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A vindication of Christian
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A
VINDICATION
OF
CHRISTIAN FAITH;

ADDRESSED
TO THOSE WHO, BELIEVING IN GOD, YET REFUSE OR
HESITATE TO BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST
WHOM HE HATH SENT.

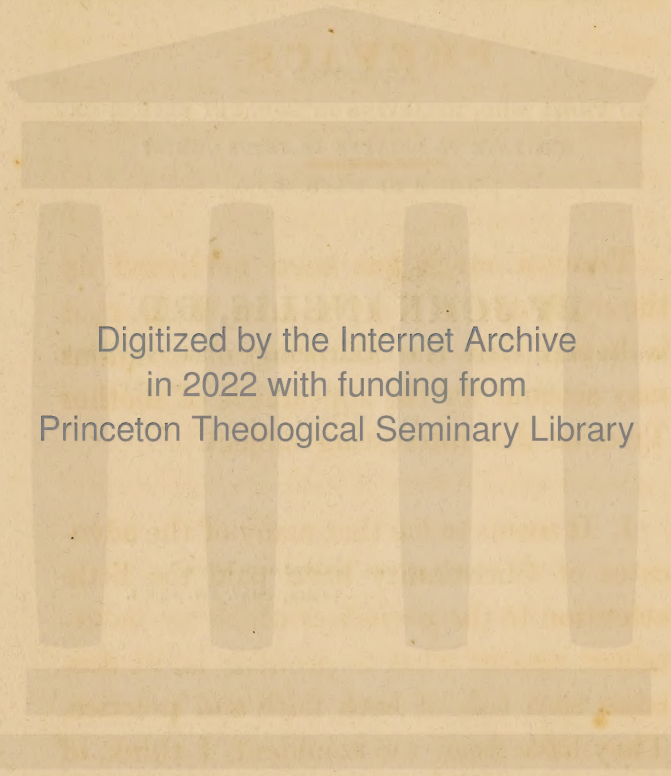
BY JOHN INGLIS, D.D.
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AND ONE OF HIS MAJESTY'S CHAPLAINS IN ORDINARY
IN SCOTLAND.

" YE BELIEVE IN GOD, BELIEVE ALSO IN ME."

JOHN, CHAP. XIV. VER. I.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH; AND
T. CADELL, STRAND, LONDON.

MDCCCXXX.



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PREFACE.

THOUGH much has been published on the evidences of the Christian Religion, it is hoped that the following observations may account for the appearance of another Tract on that interesting subject.

I. It seems to me that many of the advocates of Christianity have paid too little attention to the *prejudices* which are entertained against what is peculiar in its doctrine, as a rule of both faith and practice. They have been too confident, I think, of accomplishing their object at once, by an overpowering statement of the direct evidence, by which the Divine mission of

Christ is supported. If we had not to contend against prejudices, or preconceived opinions, perhaps a secondary place might be conveniently assigned to the argument arising from the *excellence* of the Christian doctrine. But the influence of prejudice renders the human mind very nearly inaccessible to both evidence and argument; and certain it is, that deep-rooted prejudice has, from the beginning, operated, and in the minds of many continues to operate, against a cordial reception of the Gospel of Christ.

The corrupt heart of man is naturally averse to the Gospel as a doctrine of righteousness; and the human understanding, under the influence of a corrupt heart, entertains many speculative objections to it, which have the effect to encourage and fortify men in unbelief. Till such objections be removed, they are not only an insuperable obstacle to all exercise of candour in the examination of evidence, but effectually disincline a considerable part of mankind to any consideration of the subject.

The objections are of such a nature as admits of their occurring to almost every mind; they come home to the ordinary feelings and habits of men in their connexion with this world; they have an appearance of according with the maxims and principles on which men are accustomed to reason about secular affairs; no intellectual exertion is necessary to their having full power and effect;—to the understanding of a man under the influence of a corrupt heart, they present themselves spontaneously in all their force, as often as he is called to bethink himself either of his personal interest in the doctrine of the Gospel, or of its claims to Divine origin.

To what other cause than this, can we ascribe the undeniable fact—That much of the Gospel doctrine, as preached even to professing Christians, is heard by many of them with seeming indifference? The subject, it may be said, has become trite and familiar to their minds, and therefore does not excite the degree of interest which they

naturally feel in what is new. But the want of novelty does not afford a sufficient account of the matter ; for though many things, which concern their lives and fortunes in the world, have become at least as familiar to them as the Gospel doctrine, the interest which they take in these things is not, on that account, abated. To what, then, shall we impute the difference between the two cases ? Does it arise from objections to the direct evidences of Christianity ? I am convinced that, in the minds of such men, no question on this point is either much or often entertained. From the little which they have either read or heard about the evidences of Christ's Divine mission, they do not see how it can, with reason, be rejected ; and, consequently, so far as his doctrine accords with their own preconceived opinions, they listen to it with reverence. But, when the way of salvation through Christ is illustrated, as comprising some views of the Divine character and counsel which the human mind cannot fully comprehend,—though they do not absolute-

ly deny what is thus revealed—they conceive that they may be excused for having no decided opinion respecting it ; and, in reference to such doctrine, they hear the Gospel as if they heard it not.—Even in the department of moral duty, there are some things to which they give a similar reception. There are Christian precepts which require more than *they* are disposed to regard as obligatory ;—perhaps, what is required appears to them very nearly, if not altogether, unreasonable ;—and they cannot, therefore, believe that conformity to such precepts is indispensable.

To what does this case amount ?—Though such men do not object to the direct evidences of Christianity, they do not truly make a surrender of their understandings to Christ as a Divine teacher. For they receive and acknowledge his doctrine, only so far as it is reconcileable with their own prejudices. They select for themselves, out of the Christian system, a rule of both faith and practice, but a rule which is far from comprehending all that Christ hath

taught and enjoined. In short, their objections to much of the Christian doctrine effectually prevent them from embracing it, on such evidence as would otherwise have satisfied their minds.

Now, if such be the effect of the objections in question upon some professing Christians, What shall we suppose in reference to avowed unbelievers ?

They have not been influenced by any reverence for the Author of the Christian faith that could prevent such objections from taking deep root in their minds ; they feel, on the contrary, that they are judging and acting consistently when they object to the instructions of one in whose Divine mission they do not believe ;—and, accordingly, much of their reasoning,—though perhaps more of their wit and ridicule,—has been directed against the *doctrine* of the Gospel.

Is it to be supposed that a better and more powerful statement of the direct evidences of Christ's Divine mission will of it-

self satisfy the minds of such unbelievers?— Even in dealing with those men who are so inconsistent as, in their hearts, to object to the Christian doctrine, while they make an outward profession of faith in its Author, it is in a great measure vain to argue that the evidence of his Divine mission ought to supersede their objections. This argument does not satisfy them ; and far less can we expect it to prevail in the case of avowed unbelievers. For *they* stand, as I have already hinted, on more consistent ground, by maintaining that their objections to the doctrine of Christ are, of themselves, a sufficient reason for denying his Divine mission.

By a triumphant statement of the external evidences of Christianity, we may perhaps put our adversaries to silence. They may find it impossible to bring forward even a specious objection to the historical evidence ;—and I am far from making light of this advantage. It is no small advantage that we protect others against the hazard of having their minds distracted

by a renewal of false and seductive argument. But are the men to whom I have last alluded,—or even *professing Christians* under the influence of similar prejudice,—brought nearer to a cordial reception of the whole truth as it is in Jesus—that “engrafted word,” which, if received in the spirit of meekness, “is able to save their souls?” Or is there no hope that they may be reclaimed, by our fairly meeting them on the ground which their prejudices seem to mark out for us?

It is true that the corrupt dispositions of the human heart, in which all objections to the Christian doctrine originate, are not to be otherwise corrected or subdued than by the Spirit of all Grace. But those objections, which a corrupt heart prompts some men either to devise or entertain, do not the less admit of being examined and refuted in a way calculated to be instrumental in the hand of God, towards bringing them to a saving faith in the Gospel doctrine ;—and it seems to me, that in this field of argument

the advocates of the Christian cause have encouragement to hope for success.

Perhaps unbelievers might even be justified in refusing to give any attention whatever to the direct evidence of Christ's Divine mission, till their objections to his doctrine were, in the first instance, considered and weighed. For if the doctrine were found unworthy of God, or in its nature such as could not be supposed to proceed from a perfect Being, it would be morally impossible that we should have evidence of its truth.

I do not, indeed, presume to say, that our knowledge of God, independently of Revelation, can entitle us to conclude, in all cases of doctrine, what is, or is not, compatible with the perfection of his nature ; but it will not be denied, that there might be things taught and inculcated which we could not fail to regard as inconsistent with any just idea of the Divine character and counsels ; and, consequently, they who believe in God (though not hitherto in the

Gospel of Christ) may have a right to be satisfied, in the first instance, that such things are not contained in the doctrine which we represent as proceeding from the Divine Being.

Yet it is not upon this ground chiefly,—it is chiefly upon that ground of expediency to which I have before adverted, that I feel it to be my duty to examine, in the first place, those objections which are urged against what is peculiar in the doctrine of the Gospel. Though the objections of the unbeliever, even according to his own estimate of them, should not be of the importance to which I have last referred,—though he should not be so bold as to maintain that they are of such a nature as precludes the possibility of his supposing that the religion of Christ has proceeded from a perfect Being,—though he should, therefore, find it impossible to justify himself for refusing to give attention,—even before his objections be answered—to the direct evidences of the Christian faith,—Is there no good to be done—no advantage to be gained—by re-

moving his objections in the first place, if I shall find it in my power to remove them ? Will it be a small advantage, if I can bring him to enter on an examination of the evidences with a more unprejudiced mind ? Or ought I to be deterred from making the endeavour, because he is not *entitled* to such accommodation ? Whatever concession to his prejudices may be involved in such a preparatory discussion,—if the prejudices in question be thereby removed or abated, I shall hold that both my concession and my labour are richly rewarded.

It may be argued, indeed, on the other hand, that if the nature of the doctrine were left entirely out of view, many readers might listen with more *impartiality* to a statement of the evidence by which its truth is supported. But it is impossible that this advantage should be realized ; for every man, before reading any such Tract as the present, has got some information, and has formed some opinions, whether right or wrong, respecting the doctrine of

Christ, which he cannot altogether banish from his mind, while he inquires into the evidence of its Divine origin. And equally impossible is it that the opposite course, which I propose to follow, should give undue advantage to the Christian argument ; for, though a just view of the doctrine should not only tend to remove objections, but also induce men to lend a favourable ear to the more direct evidence of its truth, an advantage thus arising from its intrinsic merits, cannot with reason be regarded as unfair.

I would therefore say to unbelievers— We have in our hands a book, or rather a collection of books, which lays claim to be a Revelation from Heaven. Before we inquire whether the claim be, in any other way, established, let us consider whether what is contained in this collection of books can be regarded as unworthy of God to reveal, or does not, on the contrary, afford strong indications of a Divine origin.

The answer to this question will go far, I

trust, to prepare the minds of some men for a satisfactory examination of that direct evidence by which the Divine mission of Christ is supported.

II. I am farther of opinion, that some of the ablest advocates of Christianity have not applied its *historical evidence* in the way best calculated to establish the truth or reality of Christ's Miracles.

So far as concerns the Miracles, I apprehend that the first and most direct purpose to be served by historical evidence, is to place men of the present day in a situation corresponding, as nearly as may be, to that of the original witnesses of the transactions in question ; and that it is by availing ourselves, in the first instance, of this advantage, that we may proceed, both most regularly and most safely, to inquire, whether these transactions were or were not miraculous.

We are assured, by historical evidence,

that, while some of the witnesses doubted or disbelieved, others, who professed to believe, bore testimony to their sincerity in that profession, by submitting to die rather than abandon it. But it is not to be forgotten, that the Gospel history, which informs us of their faith, and the evidence which they gave of its sincerity, does also acquaint us with the outward and visible circumstances, on which their belief of an invisible miraculous Agency was established. It thereby enables us to judge—not only of the sincerity—but also of the grounds, of their belief. By placing us, as far as possible, in *their* situation at the time when they beheld the transactions recorded, it calls us to say, whether, in such circumstances, we could ourselves have refused to acknowledge them as miracles ;—It virtually calls us to sit as judges between those who denied, and those who acknowledged, the presence of Divine Miraculous Agency.

This appears to me an essential advantage to any mind that is honestly desirous

of ascertaining the truth. Without availing ourselves of it, I conceive it to be impossible to do full justice to the evidences of Christian faith.

In all ordinary cases of evidence, the means of knowledge, which a witness possesses, are the first point to which we direct our attention ; and I cannot imagine to myself a reason why the same course should not be followed in reference to the miracles which are said to have been wrought in proof of Christ's Divine Mission.

Yet, so far as I know, this branch of the evidence has not recently met with the attention which it deserves.—An author, to whom the Christian cause is otherwise much indebted, (*Dr Paley*,) has, in his “ View of the Evidences,” placed it in the background ;—and my excellent friend and co-presbyter, *Dr Chalmers*, (whose Illustrations of the Historical Evidence I do, in many respects, most sincerely admire,) has declined to acknowledge what I now advert to, as any part of the argument, by which the reality of Christ's miracles requires to

be supported. I have, therefore, a strong desire to be helpful, if I can, towards presenting this part of the evidence in that prominent view to which I think it entitled,—as the foundation of all the importance which can be, afterwards, attached to the testimony of the original witnesses of the miracles, even when proved to be sincere.

If I could agree with Dr Chalmers, in regarding what the original witnesses attested as, in each case, nothing more than a fact cognizable by their bodily senses, I should think it quite sufficient to have evidence of their sincerity. But it seems to me undeniable, that what they attested respecting the miracles, resolves itself into a *combination of fact and opinion*,—and an opinion founded on circumstances of which *we* are both qualified, and called upon, to judge.—Let us derive illustration of what I now state from some one of the miracles of Christ;—let us take, for that purpose, the miracle which was wrought on a man born blind.*

* John, chap. ix.

All the facts of the case, which could be manifest to the bodily senses of the witnesses, are these—That Jesus met with a man who was understood to have been blind from his birth ; that he made clay and anointed the man's eyes with it, and said unto him—"Go, wash in the pool of Siloam;" that the man went away, and that one, who appeared to be the same person, "came back seeing." But the author of the narrative (one of the original witnesses), does more than attest these facts ; he obviously communicates to us an opinion respecting them ; for his manifest design is to convince his readers that a miracle was wrought, or that the man's eyes were opened by preternatural agency. Consequently, in order to our judging whether his opinion was well founded, it is essential that we examine the facts on which it was established. It is essential that we duly consider, in the first place, what was immediately presented to his bodily senses ; and, in the second place, a variety of accompanying or subsequent circumstances,—the pre-

vious notoriety of the man having been blind from his birth, or the possibility, on the other hand, that he only pretended to be blind, the evidence on this point afforded by his parents, the testimony which they also bore to the fact, that he who now appeared possessed of sight, was the same individual who had been born blind, and the sufficiency or insufficiency of any thing employed, like natural means of cure.—It seems impossible to deny that the circumstances of that severe scrutiny which led to all these facts being ascertained—were detailed by the Evangelist, as grounds on which he reported the case as miraculous, and for enabling others to judge of the sufficiency of these grounds.

I am aware, indeed, that there is one class of miracles which does not admit of such examination. There is reference made in the *Epistles* of the New Testament to miracle which were wrought by the first teachers of Christianity, in the various countries which they visited. These miracles

are referred to without any detail of the circumstances connected with them,—even without such a specification as can enable us to consider one of them as distinguished from another. Consequently all the evidence for the reality of such miracles, rests upon uncontradicted testimony,—testimony uncontradicted by those to whom the Epistles were addressed, and by whom we may presume that its truth or falsehood was known. But, we cannot be, for that reason, absolved from the obligation to examine those circumstances connected with other miracles, which are obviously detailed for enabling us to judge whether the eye-witnesses had good cause to acknowledge the presence of miraculous agency. The opportunity, which we have, of so doing, imparts to these miracles a superior degree of importance for the establishment of Christian faith.

Yet, in order to this part of the argument being effectually supplied, it seems to me essential to adopt an arrangement, which

(so far as I know), has not hitherto recommended itself to the advocates of the Christian cause—an arrangement under which we may decline any consideration of the miracles, till we shall have considered and weighed all the evidence, which it is proposed to urge, for the truth of the Gospel history, as a narrative of facts not miraculous.

If the testimony of eye-witnesses, unconnected with the ground of their belief or opinion, were all the evidence for the reality of miracles that ought to be desired or sought after, the martyrdom of the first teachers of Christianity would be almost the only fact essential to be established, before we should pronounce a judgment on any miracle which they have attested. But convinced, as I am, that the reality of Christ's miracles cannot be incontrovertibly proved, without our sitting in judgment on those circumstances, not in themselves miraculous, on which the eye-witnesses founded their own belief,—I regard it as indispensable to ascertain the truth of the Gospel history, as comprising all the

circumstances to which I refer, before I invite the reader even to entertain a question respecting the miracles.

I am not aware that, in reference to other points, the conduct of the argument in the following pages requires any previous explanation or apology. Whatever may be new in the illustrations, will be respected or not, according to its merits. So far, on the other hand, as I am indebted to others, I desire to acknowledge my obligation. Dr Macknight's "Truth of the Gospel History" has directed my attention to points which might otherwise have escaped my notice, and has assisted me in useful references. My recollection also enables me to say that some of the sermons of Archbishop Secker, Dr Ogden, and Mr Symmons, had made an impression on my mind, from which I have derived advantage.—I need scarcely add that, in every such treatise, there must be a considerable proportion of common-place

argument ; for, though it be familiar to the minds of many readers, it is neither the less important in itself, nor the less essential to such a complete and connected view as may be expected to produce the desired effect.

It only remains for me, in concluding these Prefatory Remarks, to request the reader's attention to the following Table of CONTENTS, as comprising a series of Propositions, which I hope may be recognised as sufficient, in the event of their being duly established, to answer every reasonable demand for evidence.

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INTRODUCTION.

MANKIND WERE IN WANT OF A DIVINE REVELATION,
AND HAD GROUND TO HOPE FOR IT.

IN an argument addressed to men who believe in God, it should not be necessary to employ many words for the establishment of this proposition.

Without a Divine Revelation, both the origin and the destination of the Human Race were involved in obscurity. Even their existing condition was not to be accounted for, without a view to dispensations in a future state that should vindicate, in some respects, the present disposals of Providence. Yet the evidences of a future state were imperfect and unsatisfactory; and a consciousness of ill desert made it the more difficult for men to look forward to it with hope and confidence.

Was it, in these circumstances, unnatural to expect that the Being who created men should, in some way, impart to them the knowledge which was requisite to the satisfaction and establishment of their minds?—Supposing this world to be—

what some circumstances seemed to indicate—only a place of trial and discipline, in which men might be prepared for a future state, Was it not important, for the accomplishment of this divine purpose, that they should have such an assurance of the gracious design as might engage their hearts to comply with it? Supposing, at the same time, that the Divine Being, in his infinite mercy and love, was willing to extend forgiveness to penitent sinners in some way consistent with the honour of his government, Was it not important that this blessed purpose should be somehow revealed, as a mean of engaging men so to love and serve God upon earth, as to be prepared for enjoying him in heaven?

The principle of reason, with which mankind were endowed by their Creator, qualified them, in some measure, to search for a knowledge of these things. But their reason—from whatever cause—whether original or superinduced imbecility—was found practically inadequate to arrive at any certain conclusion. Was it, in these circumstances, unnatural that He, who gave them the faculty of reason, should also supply its defects, by communicating, in another way, the knowledge of which they were so much in want?

Whatever may have been the origin and cause of either the ignorance or the wickedness which

have prevailed among men,—if it be only admitted that ignorance and wickedness are susceptible of increase or diminution,—Can it be accounted unnatural that, in such a case, the Divine Being should interpose in behalf of his rational offspring? —It was scarcely possible to think of God as a Being of infinite perfection, without some hope that his unbounded goodness, combining with his delight in whatever is holy, and just, and true, would incline him to employ effectual measures against the dominion of sin, and for advancing the cause of truth and righteousness in the world which he had made.

Presuming, therefore, upon these grounds, that a Divine Revelation will not be antecedently accounted either unnecessary, or a blessing which was not to be hoped for, I would invite those whom I address to consider deliberately whether the Gospel of Christ ought not to be regarded and accepted as proceeding from God.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION IS NOT, IN ANY RESPECT,
UNWORTHY OF GOD, BUT, ON THE CONTRARY, AF-
FORDS PRESUMPTIVE EVIDENCE OF ITS OWN DIVINE
ORIGIN.

THE doctrine of Christ has been sometimes called a republication of the religion of Nature; and it accordingly imparts the authority of direct revelation to some fundamental truths which unassisted reason had sought to ascertain. But it also discloses many interesting views of our present condition, and the way of salvation, which the reason of man had not anticipated;—and, even in respect of moral duty, it prescribes and requires more than either the understandings or the consciences of men had previously recognised as essential to moral perfection.

Let us endeavour candidly to estimate its merits and claims in these three different departments.

SECTION I.

THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION CONFIRMS AND ESTABLISHES, IN A WAY WORTHY OF GOD, THOSE FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS OF RELIGION, WHICH UNASSISTED REASON HAD SOUGHT TO ASCERTAIN.

THE reason of man, aided (it may be) by original and traditionary revelation, had, in some measure, recognised the existence of an Infinite Being, from whom all things proceed, whose Providence superintends and governs all things, and who will reward or punish men in a future state, according to what they have done, or left undone, in the present life. But the evidence and certainty of a Providence, which superintends and governs all things, depend on the evidence which we previously have of the infinite perfection of the Divine Nature; and our evidence of the perfection of the Divine Nature can never be complete without a certainty of a future state of rewards and punishments, in which the justice of God may be more fully vindicated than it is in the present world. The whole scheme, therefore, of Natural Religion mainly depended on the evidence which unassisted reason could afford of a future state of retribution. Additional light on this sub-

ject was to cast light on every other ; and it will be found that there is no argument for a future state, suggested by the reason of man, which the Christian doctrine, and the circumstances attending its promulgation, do not materially strengthen.

1. Unassisted reason had been willing to infer, *from the faculties of the human soul*, that it is a principle distinct and separate from whatever is material or bodily ; and, consequently, that Immortality is the law of its nature. But the Christian revelation imparts to this argument much additional strength. It removes any doubt which had been previously entertained respecting the separate existence of spirits ; and, by what it communicates respecting the ministry of angels in particular, as beings purely spiritual, whose faculties, at the same time, bear an intimate resemblance to those of the human soul, it powerfully encourages us to infer that the soul will be found allied to angelic beings, in its essence as much as in its faculties ; or, in the words of Christ himself, that we shall be “ as the angels of God in Heaven.”

2. Unassisted reason had strenuously maintained that the inequality, which is manifest, in the distribution of rewards and punishments in this world, could not be permitted under the govern-

ment of a Being infinitely just, if there were not a future state of more equal and perfect retribution. But, without the aid of a Divine revelation, men had no other evidence or exemplification of Divine justice, than what the moral government of this world afforded. It is only the way of salvation through Christ that affords such decisive evidence of the inflexible justice of God, as can assure us of its being ultimately vindicated in the view of his rational offspring. That atonement for sin, which he required, leaves no doubt in the mind of the Christian that the justice of God will at length be manifest in all his doings—that it is only in reference to our condition as immortal beings, that we are here placed in such a state of probation as supersedes immediate reward or punishment, and that a future state there must be, in which God will render to every man according to his deeds.

3. There are some things to which the Author of our Being has borne indirect witness or testimony from the beginning, by endowing us with a disposition, and in some measure a capacity, to recognise them. In this way he appears to have communicated to men a sense or anticipation of their own immortality. But, in addition to those anticipations of immortality, which may be regarded as the witness of our Creator within us, the Christian revelation

bears such direct and unequivocal testimony to a future state, as forbids those who believe in Christ to entertain any doubt of its reality. Immortality, and our interests in it, are the subject on which the whole doctrine of the gospel bears, as on one common point or centre. All the promises of Christ ultimately resolve themselves into one ; and “ this is the promise,” saith an apostle, “ which he hath promised us, even eternal life.”

4. Notwithstanding the visible prevalence of the power of death, there had been, from the beginning, some accompanying and visible indications that its reign and dominion might be at length superseded. That mingled dispensation of good and evil, under which the sons of men lived upon earth, strongly indicated that they were here in a state of trial and discipline, and might ultimately find refuge from the power of death in that mercy, through which alone they, in the meanwhile, lived and moved. But the Christian revelation goes farther ;—it enlarges and establishes this ground of hope. It teaches us that it was only by sin that death was brought into the world, and, consequently, that the Saviour of men, by putting an end to sin, will effectually put an end to death as the creature of sin.

Within a short time, indeed, after the reign of

death had commenced, there was even an example and earnest of our ultimate superiority to its power. *Enoch*, the seventh from Adam, was translated to heaven without seeing death; and it is by no means impossible that this encouraging fact might be known, by tradition, to many who were, in other respects, very nearly left to the guidance of unassisted reason. But, in this respect as well as others, the Gospel of Christ has brought life and immortality far more clearly to light. It teaches us, that, as an emblem of our ultimate victory over death, Christ was pleased to restore to life, and to all the visible functions of life, more than one of the children of men, over whom death had exercised its full dominion; and that, after He had himself voluntarily submitted to this king of terrors, for the purpose of working out our deliverance, he afforded such evidence, as imagination could not have readily anticipated, of the power which he had acquired over death, by rising from the grave at the time which he had appointed, as the first fruits of them that sleep.

While all the arguments for a future state, suggested by human reason, were inconclusive, even to the philosophic mind, they were little calculated to make any impression on the great body of mankind. So far as *they* entertained any prospects

beyond the grave, they believed as they were taught, without being able to give a reason of the faith which was in them. But that disclosure of immortality, which the Gospel of Christ affords, is calculated, in the views now presented, to make such an impression on every mind, as renders the Christian's hope of immortal bliss an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast.

Let it not, however, be supposed, that in referring, at present, either to the import of the Gospel doctrine, or to facts in the Gospel history, I am claiming any man's assent to their truth. My single object, at present, is to shew, that, if they be true, they cast a strong light on the doctrine of a future state, and a light of which the world was much in need. If this be granted, it ought, at least, to satisfy the candid mind, that *so far* the Christian revelation is not unworthy of God, and ought not, therefore, to be rejected, without a fair and unprejudiced examination of its evidences.

Perhaps it is not too much to expect that a revelation which, in this respect, so beautifully accords with what had been the anticipations of unassisted reason, should, on that account, even gain a *favourable* attention to whatever proofs it can offer of its divine origin. For we have seen that the question, which respects the doctrine of immor-

tality, was the problem which the reason of man had been most solicitous to resolve, and a problem which, if resolved in the affirmative, goes far to settle, in a way the most satisfactory, every other question which affects the great principles of Natural Religion—either the infinite perfection of the Divine Being, or the certainty of a Divine Providence extending, in this world, to the affairs of men.

But I observed, that the Christian doctrine also discloses many interesting views of our condition by nature, and the way or means of salvation, which the reason of man had not anticipated. To some of these, human wisdom has objected; and the validity of the objections falls next to be considered.

SECTION II.

THERE IS NOTHING IN THE *PECULIAR* DOCTRINE OF CHRIST, RELATIVE TO THE PRESENT CONDITION OF OUR NATURE, AND THE WAY OF SALVATION THROUGH HIM, WHICH DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE WORTHY OF GOD.

SOME men, who profess to believe in God, have alleged that what the Christian doctrine propounds respecting the present condition of our nature is altogether incredible. The Scripture account, that the parents of our race, originally created holy and happy, did, by sinning against God, fall from that blessed state—that their posterity have been involved in the consequences of their fall—and that this catastrophe is the primary cause of all the wickedness and misery which prevail in the world—seems to them very unreasonable; nay, that we should suffer in consequence of the fault of others, seems to them even unjust. But, is it really unreasonable to suppose that the rational offspring of God were originally created, in some measure like to himself in holiness and happiness—strangers to both natural and moral evil? This supposition seems, on the contrary, to accord with every

just conception of a perfect Being. Is it, then, unreasonable to think that our first parents were, at the same time, invested with a freedom of will, or of choice, so as to have it in their power to choose what was evil? Without a freedom of will, or of choice, it is difficult to conceive how there should be any thing virtuous or praiseworthy in a moral agent. We, accordingly, experience that we have, ourselves, a freedom of choice, and have therefore no right to pronounce the same thing impossible in the case of the parents of our race. Is it, in the next place, either incredible or wonderful that sin, once introduced into the world, should be productive of misery? We have too much experience, alas! that sin is in all cases productive of misery. Are the objectors, then, to stand upon the single ground, that it cannot be consistent with Divine Justice to leave us to suffer in consequence of the fault of others? Even this objection cannot be maintained, consistently with our experience of the ways of God; for it is not more certain that God governs the world, than that suffering in consequence of the fault of others, is, under his government, very commonly exemplified. Is not the prodigality of a parent very often the occasion of poverty and hardship, if not of disease also, to his offspring? Does not this visibly take place under the providence of that very Being, whose

justice, it is contended, cannot admit of our suffering in consequence of the sin of our first parents?—The whole case seems to resolve itself into the following alternative. Either men must have been created, at first, holy and happy, and must have made themselves sinful and miserable, as the Scriptures teach us; or the world must have been created by God in its present state,—full, as it is, of both sin and misery,—and, consequently, God himself must be the immediate author of all the natural and moral evil which exist in it. But, in reasoning, as I now do, with men who profess to believe in God as a Being infinitely holy and good, it should not, I think, be a question which of these propositions is least liable to objection. If we sincerely believe in God, as the moral governor of the universe, what the Christian doctrine teaches us concerning the original state, and subsequent fall, of the parents of our race, and concerning our own consequent sin and misery, will account to us in a far more satisfactory manner for what we experience to be the condition of our nature, than all the theories on this subject which the imagination of man can devise.

The Scripture account of our fallen state has even the peculiar advantage, that it leaves us ground of hope. Had not men been originally made for better things, a view of our existing con-

dition could not have given us any ground to expect them. But, if we have indeed fallen from a high estate, a hope of restoration to it seems less unnatural. It is amidst the ruins of our original estate that we find the first encouragement to that precious hope, which the doctrine of the Gospel imparts to us.

But objections have also been urged against what the Gospel reveals concerning a way of salvation to men from the sin and misery which, confessedly, do prevail in the world.

1. What the Scriptures teach us respecting the character of the agents employed in the work of our salvation, seems to prove a stumbling-block to many. The New Testament explicitly directs us to regard the Saviour as a divine and uncreated being, and reveals to us, at the same time, another divine and uncreated agent, in the person of the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and from the Son, thereby calling us to recognise what has been denominated a *Trinity* in the Godhead ; to all which, the objection is—that it is *mysterious and incomprehensible*.

It would be vain to deny that the doctrine in question is mysterious in a high degree ; to the

human mind it is certainly incomprehensible. If any man attempt to explain it, he only exposes his own folly and presumption. But are we, on that account, entitled to reject or deny it, in the event of its appearing that the Scriptures, in which it is contained, are supported by such evidence as would, otherwise, satisfy us that they proceed from God?

It does not seem reasonable that men who so well know, from experience, the limited nature of their own capacities, and at the same time acknowledge an Infinite Being, should at all question the possibility that, in reference to the Divine Nature, things may be or exist, which, to their minds, are incomprehensible. They cannot do so without palpable inconsistency. For men who believe in God already recognise and admit many things relative to his nature and agency, which they are altogether unable to comprehend. What sort of conception do they form of the work of God, in creating all things out of nothing, and of what is called the immensity of the Divine Being, or the omnipresence of one who is indivisible?

Were they so determined against acknowledging the mysteries of the Gospel of Christ, as to be willing, for the sake of consistency, to deny whatever is most universally acknowledged concerning both

the attributes and the works of God,—all this would avail them nothing. For there are innumerable appearances on the face of nature—things visible to the corporeal eye, the existence of which, therefore, must be acknowledged—that are altogether incomprehensible to us. I need not refer either to the visible heavens, or to the human frame,—I may safely content myself with the most familiar, even hackneyed, allusion to the ordinary process of nature, in the very earth on which we tread. Where is the man who comprehends, and will undertake to explain, how the small seed, which is thrown into the bosom of the earth, gradually produces a stately plant, similar in its properties to that which produced the seed itself,—why it must undergo corruption before it rise to vegetable life, or by what means, after it hath sprung, it derives from the earth that vegetable food which nourishes it unto perfection?

So far from our having a right to deny the possibility of any thing which is revealed concerning God, merely on account of its rising above our comprehension, things more or less incomprehensible to us were naturally to be *expected* in any revelation, which we might receive, of the nature and ways of an Infinite Being. Men had even experience to lead them to this conclusion—experience arising from the way in which the Divinity

had previously manifested himself to the world. He had made himself known by the works of nature, and by the principle of reason in the human frame. But, while many of the things most familiar to us in the book of nature rise entirely above our comprehension, it seems to be a distinguishing characteristic of our reason, to enquire into things which it cannot comprehend,—to start questions which it is incapable of answering, doubts which it is incapable of solving,—and to leave us in the end perplexed with mystery.

Perhaps some of those whom I address may be inclined to ask, whether things which could not be rendered intelligible to man—supposing them to be as they are revealed—might not, with more propriety, have remained hidden from him in the depths of the Divine counsel? The question may seem to be important; but it only leads to an answer illustrative of both the wisdom and the grace of God. For nothing that is incomprehensible to the human mind, is revealed to us without necessity, or without a view to important advantages which result to us from that knowledge of it which is actually communicated. If a knowledge of the divine character of the Saviour had not been necessary for the comfort and edification of those whom he came to save, or if a knowledge of the

separate work of the Holy Spirit in our salvation had not been, for like reasons, precious to the believing soul, it might never have been known on earth that the unity of the Godhead admits of those separate or distinct modes of subsistence, which the Christian doctrine calls us to recognise. But, in fact, those truths which are objected to as incomprehensible, are the great foundation of all the hope which we entertain as Christians. Is it possible that, in these circumstances, we should not be contented with devoutly adoring what in this world we cannot comprehend, or that we would really prefer to have remained ignorant of such things, and consequently ignorant of the only true way of salvation?

In reference to many worldly cases, we practically acknowledge, as facts, things which we do not comprehend, because our doing so is conducive to our worldly interest. We also communicate to our children, as facts, many things which we do not pretend to explain to them, till their reason more nearly arrive at maturity. As earthly parents, we account this our duty to our children; we see it to be, in many respects, necessary. Why, then, may not our Heavenly Father deal with us in a similar manner, during the infancy of our nature?—for at present our nature is but in a state of infancy. Shall we, in this case, be so foolish

and froward as to refuse believing, or to deny the possibility of the things which He communicates, merely because our intellectual capacity is not hitherto so far advanced or matured, as to enable us to comprehend them?

It has been objected, more particularly, that such an union of the human to the divine nature, as the Christian revelation directs us to recognise in the person of the Saviour, is altogether incongruous, unworthy of God, and therefore incredible.

In the first place, it is said to be so incongruous, as to be, on that account, incredible. But this argument cannot be reasonably maintained by men who duly attend to the union of the human soul and the human body. For, however exalted be the nature of God above that of man,—if we consider merely the discrepance or contrariety which would preclude the possibility of union,—there does not appear a greater contrariety between the Divine mind and a mind in some measure created after its image, than there certainly is between soul and body. Even the union of the Divine Spirit with *human flesh*, cannot, with reason, be regarded as incredible, by men who recognise, in their own frame, the union of a spiritual with a material

substance, and an union so complete, that the two, in the meanwhile, constitute one person.

In the next place, it is said that the union in question is unworthy of God—that no reasonable mind can allow itself to imagine that the Divinity should condescend to connect himself, in any such manner, with a human frame. But they, who maintain this argument, seem to forget that the ways of God are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. The great of this world may apprehend a loss of dignity from condescension, because they mistake wherein dignity consists. It is true, that condescension, proceeding from mean and ignoble motives, may justly expose men to the loss of dignity. It is also true, that dignity, which depends on outward rank or condition, unsupported by corresponding endowments of the mind, may be exposed to hazard from condescension, because, in the hour of condescension, the false glare of outward condition is eclipsed. But the true dignity of the mind only appears the more illustrious, in proportion as condescension enables us to examine it the more closely, or in a greater variety of bearings. To a justly discerning eye, even the dignity and glory of the King of kings were never more effectually displayed, than by his condescension in behalf of his guilty creatures. For in

what does the glory of the Divine Being chiefly consist, if not in the goodness so manifest in all his doings? or in what department is his goodness most illustriously displayed, if not in his unparalleled condescension for working out our eternal salvation? If condescension be at all an act or expression of goodness, it is obvious that the higher be the station from which the person descends, and the lower the condition to which he humbles himself, for a truly benevolent purpose, the more illustrious must his goodness appear to every discriminating mind.

2. An objection has also been urged against what the Gospel reveals concerning the suffering of the Saviour—against the doctrine that he suffered, the just for the unjust, to make atonement for the sins of men. It has been said that this doctrine is incompatible with the wisdom and goodness of God.

Perhaps this objection, like the former, calls us to pronounce upon some things, of which we are not well qualified to judge; but it will be found that there is, in this case, as much within the reach of our comprehension as may go far to satisfy the inquiring mind.

The law of God is violated by men—the threat-

enings of his law are despised, and the honour of his government insulted. How, then, are the transgressors to escape the deserved punishment?

If we believe in God as the righteous governor of the universe, we cannot suppose that this purpose is to be accomplished in any way which shall not provide for the authority of his law being henceforth maintained in the view of his rational offspring; for who would otherwise be afraid to trample under foot his commandment?

Shall it then be held that the *repentance* of the sinner may be accepted as the requisite satisfaction to Divine justice?

The Divine administration, so far as we are practically acquainted with it, does not justify the hope that, through repentance alone, we may obtain the pardon of sin. The general laws of nature are laws of God, established by the wisdom of God. Yet according to these, according to the constitution of things under which we live, as connected with our interest in the present world, repentance for what we have done amiss is far from being sufficient, in most cases, to save us from those evil consequences which are the natural and proper punishment;—we are, in most cases, left to suffer for our folly. What ground have we, then, for supposing that what we experience to be at present the rule of the Divine government will not

prove to be a rule of everlasting application? We have some cause to think that such a rule may be, in all cases, necessary to the ends of government. The repentance of a criminal does not procure his pardon or acquittal before any earthly tribunal. It is not found consistent with the purposes of human government that his repentance should have this effect; nor have we any separate and sufficient grounds for concluding that it would prove more consistent with the ends and purposes of the Divine government.

If, for these reasons, it seem that an atonement for sin was necessary for maintaining the honour of the Divine government, in extending mercy even to the penitent, upon what principle shall we object to that way of atonement which the Gospel reveals?

If it was essential that the authority of the Divine law should be maintained, while mercy was to be extended to those who had transgressed it, does not this purpose appear to be effectually accomplished? What intelligent being may not henceforth dread to break that law, if nothing but the blood of the Son of God could expiate such an offence?—Or in what other respect does the atonement in question appear unworthy, either of Di-

vine wisdom to devise, or of Divine justice to accept?

While it was at least congruous and suitable, that what was to be endured for the sins of men should be endured in the nature of man,—while it was the human nature of Christ that also rendered him capable of suffering, the Divine Nature, to which it was united, gave that value to his suffering which the case required, and which nothing else could have imparted.—It does not seem that any thing in the power of a created being, either to do or to suffer, could have been accepted as a satisfaction to Divine Justice. For, on the one hand, no created being could have a right to present himself as a surety for others, without authority derived from a Divine appointment. And, on the other hand, any thing undertaken and executed by him in obedience to the appointment or command of God, could not have amounted to more than his own immediate duty, consequently could not have made atonement in any sense for our offences. But, regarding the Saviour as uncreated and independent, what he did and suffered appears to meet the very exigency of the case. Though his humiliation in these respects was by the appointment of his Heavenly Father, the appointment did not make it duty. He gave what he did not owe ;

and what he gave could therefore be sustained as an atonement for the sins of men.

It has indeed been urged that, if justice, which calls for the punishment of offenders, be an attribute of the Divinity, such justice must have required the punishment of the sinner himself—that its demands could not be satisfied by the blood of the innocent. But they who make this objection seem to have, in one respect, an erroneous idea of the justice of God ; and it is essential that we reason with a correct understanding of what is implied in this Divine attribute.

It is well known that justice, as required in a governor or public magistrate on earth, is a very different thing from justice as required of an individual in his private capacity. While the justice which calls for punishment is essential to the one, it is forbidden to the other. Consequently, if the justice which God prescribes to man be an image of what is inherent in himself, that justice which demands the punishment of an offender can belong to the Divine Being only in the character of a governor, and cannot be exercised otherwise than with a view to the ends of government. When such a satisfaction, therefore, is made for the sins of men, as maintains the honour and authority of

the Divine government, the justice of God makes no farther claim; mercy is then allowed to triumph;—the Divine Being, as Lord of the moral world, so far from still requiring the punishment of the delinquent himself, rejoices in his escape.

It is true, that a human governor or earthly magistrate cannot, in any case, accept a substitution of the innocent for the guilty; but the reasons why *he* can exercise no such power are altogether inapplicable to the case before us. The man who may offer to die for his friend, has no right to dispose of his own life, and consequently the governor or magistrate, to whom the offer is made, can have no right to accept it. But, in the case before us, the person who offers to die for the sins of men is an independent Being, who has “power to lay down his life, and power to take it up again.” That supreme Governor, also, who accepts the offer, is exempt from any law that could forbid such acceptance; for the immutable law of his own nature is nothing else than a desire of promoting the greatest good; and, by means of the substitution proposed, the great ends of both justice and mercy are at once attained.

Perhaps by some men the argument which I have thus followed out may be regarded as unnecessary, and as having too much the appearance

of subjecting the ways of God to the principles and rules which are applicable to the affairs of men. To any such objection my answer is, that I believe there are minds to whose satisfaction such reasoning may be conducive, and that it cannot possibly be derogatory from the honour of the Divine Being to shew that his own ways are not inconsistent with those which he has prescribed to his rational offspring. But if the question in the mind of any man still be—How he is to believe it possible that one, who was “in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God,” should, as a man, become obedient unto death, for the sake of creatures so inferior and insignificant as we are,—the only answer which I have to offer, beyond what has been previously suggested, must, in a great measure, resolve itself into the insufficiency of a finite mind to determine what is or is not possible in the ways of an Infinite Being. However inferior and insignificant men be, compared to Him who created them, it would ill become any creature to determine, that either the race of men, or any conceivable existence that resembles God, may not be an object for him to save. If, in the view of that Being who inhabits eternity, a thousand years be as one day, an atom may be as a world; and in what degree the suffering of the only begotten Son may serve to advance or

manifest the glory of God in the view of many of his intelligent offspring, more capable than we are to perceive and admire it ; or whether it may not tend to preserve in a state of innocence and just subjection the inhabitants of millions of worlds to which we are strangers, are matters which we may better know and understand—only in that future state, in which we shall see the Saviour face to face.

3. An objection has been urged against what the Gospel reveals respecting the agency of the Spirit of God in renewing and sanctifying the spirit of man. It has been said that such an operation on the heart of man, unperceived by himself, is altogether incomprehensible, and for that reason it seems to be accounted impossible.

But, in replying to this objection, it cannot be necessary to take much ground of argument that has not been already illustrated. For, however incomprehensible the work of the Spirit of God may be, they who would for this reason deny its reality, do not, I presume, pretend to more understanding or comprehension of the work of God, in creating men at first out of nothing, and endowing them with those very powers and faculties which, in the new creation, he renovates and improves. To ac-

knowledge God as the father of our spirits as well as the former of our bodies, and yet to deny the possibility of his renewing the spirit that is in us, is too glaring an inconsistency.

Even that the Divine operation is unperceived by us, cannot be sustained as an objection; for we are so constituted, that we cannot have a perception of what proceeds from another without an intervention of our bodily senses. I may, indeed, have a perception or consciousness of both the influence exerted and the effect produced on my mind by a remembrance and consideration of things which are not, at the moment, present to my organs of sense. The knowledge which, by their intervention, has been once communicated to me, I can store up and recall to view without their renewed agency. The impressions which I so retain may have the effect of exciting in me the passions of love or hatred, hope or fear; and the exercise in which I am so engaged, is as exclusively a spiritual function, as any of which human nature is capable. But still I am indebted for it to a communication originally received through the medium of my bodily senses, and to a renewal or reconsideration of the impression which I in this way received. If, on the contrary, my inward man is to be immediately and directly the recep-

tacle of what is purely spiritual, it is quite obvious that my bodily senses cannot be the medium through which such things are to be communicated ; and, unless we can be referred to some other primary and original medium of communication accommodated to such a case, it is impossible for us to comprehend how the direct and immediate agency of a Spiritual Being on our spiritual frame should be at all discerned or perceived by us.

In short, the objection to what is revealed on this subject seems to have originated in an abuse of the Divine condescension. The Divine Being condescends, for our greater good, to make our own understanding, as well as our own will and affections, partly instrumental in the blessed work of renewing and sanctifying our nature. With that view, He presents to us arguments and motives to what is good, by the intervention, in the first instance, of our bodily senses. He addresses himself to our senses as a medium through which his counsel and will shall be outwardly communicated to us ; and because, thus far, we are enabled to comprehend the manner of his dealing with us, the rising presumption of some minds would lead them to conclude that more than what we thus comprehend is impossible with God.

I am somewhat ashamed of having employed,

in this case, such abstract reasoning as I have been enabled, in others, to avoid. My apology is, that for the satisfaction of some men, I have thought it necessary. But I trust that there are few of my readers who may not be satisfied with the single and unencumbered consideration, that the Being who created the soul of man—who alone created all things—to whom all things, which do not involve a contradiction, are alike possible and easy—can undoubtedly find access to our hearts, in any way which approves itself to him, in order to his moulding and framing them according to his pleasure.

SECTION III.

IN THE DEPARTMENT OF MORAL DUTY, THE GOSPEL REQUIRES MORE THAN UNASSISTED REASON HAD REGARDED AS OBLIGATORY, BUT NOTHING WHICH WELL-DIRECTED REASON CAN REFUSE TO ACKNOWLEDGE AS WORTHY OF GOD, AND CONDUCTIVE TO THE PERFECTION OF OUR NATURE.

IT would not be an easy task to mark or define with precision, all that distinguishes the morality of the Gospel from what had been dictated by unassisted reason in its best estate. But there certainly are some precepts of Christianity, in a great measure peculiar to it; and there are other cases of moral obligation, in which men, without the aid of Divine revelation, had not *generally* recognised such a standard of duty as that to which the religion of Christ requires us to conform. It is therefore essential to the vindication of Christian faith, that the scheme of morality, which it unfolds, shall not appear in any respect unworthy of God.

What the Gospel requires has been, in some instances, matter of offence, on account of the idiomatic language in which it is expressed,—not on

account of its real import. But, in such cases, it is only necessary to interpret the language in a way consistent with what the Author of the Gospel has elsewhere enjoined in words which do not admit of being misunderstood. Jesus says, upon one occasion, that a man cannot be his disciple, if he "hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters."* But the mutual love which ought to subsist among parents and children, husbands and wives, brethren and sisters, and all the duties resulting from that natural affection, are, on other occasions, inculcated by the Gospel of Christ, in such a variety of plain and consistent language, as makes it obvious that nothing more could be intended, in the case before us, than to represent the obligation which we are under to maintain every other affection in a state of just subordination to the love of our God and Saviour.

Trusting, therefore, that such an example may satisfy the reader respecting other cases, in which an objection might arise from the enigmatical nature of the language employed, I would proceed to a consideration of what is peculiar or distinguishing in the real import of the morality of the Gospel.

* Luke, chap. xiv. ver. 26.

The Divine Teacher, in whom I invite men to believe, gave early and explicit intimation that the laws of his religion were to take cognizance, not of the outward conduct only, but also of the heart and its affections; and to this principle no objection seems to be avowed. Whatever deviations from it had taken place under the sanction of other teachers, and whatever secret aversion to it there still be in the corrupt heart, its essential rectitude has been found too obvious to admit of its being openly questioned. But there are some particular precepts which call for more consideration.

1. The Author of Christianity gave early notice that the virtue of *humility* was to constitute the foundation of what should be required in the character of his disciples,—by annexing to this virtue in particular the broad and comprehensive promise of an interest in his spiritual kingdom. “Blessed,” said he, “are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* The proud heart of man has also observed, in connexion with humility as a moral precept, the humiliating tendency of that way of salvation which the Gospel reveals, and has objected to the whole Christian

* Matth. chap. v. ver. 3.

system, regarded in this view, as derogatory from the dignity of human nature.

It was but too natural that the same spirit, which (as the Scriptures teach us) first led man to rebel against his Maker, should also object to the means now employed for its own cure. But, if a regard to the *real* dignity of human nature has, in this case, an influence on the minds of any, their apprehensions must surely originate in a misconception of what is implied in Christian humility.

Humility, as a Christian virtue, does not consist in thinking worse of ourselves than truth would dictate. It has, like all other virtues, its foundation in truth. Nor does the pride, which is opposed to it, consist in entertaining a just sense of what belongs to us—of our real merit, our just claims, or our proper dignity. The essence of pride consists in pretending to be what we are not, or in claiming what is not our due; and the essence of humility, in “not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but thinking soberly.” If *to be humble* must be regarded as an expression of comparison, denoting that our opinion of ourselves is low, it does not denote low as compared with the truth, but low as compared

with what the hearts of men too commonly dictate.

Upon what possible ground, then, can this virtue fail to approve itself to the unprejudiced reason or understanding of men? So far from being incompatible with the dignity of human nature, it imparts to us both the dignity and the independence which seem to be most desirable, even in a worldly view. It is only the man who does not overrate his own consequence, that can have any security against the mortification of seeing his claims denied; he alone stands upon a footing of real independence, as pretending to nothing which others can justly refuse. He is, in consequence, enabled to pass through the world with an open countenance and an open mind; he has no secrets connected with his dignity, which he dreads that others may detect,—no alarm, therefore, for the most penetrating eye—no mysterious veil to preserve. What is more important,—it is only he that seems to be qualified for communicating with the Father of his spirit;—for, as it is only he that has a just sense of his own weakness and his own wants, it is his prayer alone that can be directed aright—directed for the supply of what he truly needs; and, while God, therefore, “resisteth the proud, he giveth grace to the humble.”

2. Closely allied, in some respects, to humility is the precept of *self-denial*. “If any man,” saith Christ, “will come after me, let him deny himself.”* The language is unquestionably of a mortifying kind, and is regarded by many as a hard saying. Nor do I at all disavow, that what it requires must be more or less felt as a hardship; with no reason could it otherwise receive such a name as self-denial. Yet, if we attend to the case, we shall find that there is nothing implied in it which our reason or understanding can refuse to sanction.

The precept certainly requires, that we deny or refuse to ourselves any enjoyment of this life, and any means of preserving life itself, that would prove inconsistent with the honour of Christ, and the salvation of our immortal souls. But how is it possible that less should be required? Without refusing what is sinful in this life, we should be incapable of enjoying the life which is to come; —and shall it, indeed, be accounted unreasonable to require of us what is indispensable to both the perfection and happiness of our nature?

They who object to the Christian precept of self-denial, as either unreasonable or degrading, ought

* Matth. chap. xvi. ver. 24.

at least to consider whether they do not, at the same time, approve and sanction something very like it indeed, as a principle of worldly wisdom. What is the education which the wisdom of the world prescribes to the young and untutored mind, but a regular system of self-denial? Not a day passes in early life, without our being required to deny or refuse to ourselves some present enjoyment, with a view to future and distant advantage of a worldly kind. So long as we remain in this world, we find it necessary to act, more or less, on a similar principle;—and, though any worldly reward, which we can reap as the fruit of such self-denial, is not worthy of being compared to what awaits the disciples of Christ hereafter,—there are not wanting instances, in which the self-denial prescribed by the world is more grievous than what the religion of Christ does, in ordinary circumstances, exact.

3. Another precept, or rather a whole department of precepts, allied in their spirit to both humility and self-denial, has given still greater offence.—“Love your enemies,” said Christ, “bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.” *

* Matth. chap. v. ver. 44.

These precepts have been regarded as unnatural, and what they require, as impracticable. But, as objections to Christian duty are apt to originate in a misconception of what is required, it may be useful to consider what is implied in *loving our enemies*.

In the language of common life, the term *love* is usually employed to denote a peculiar and distinguishing regard ; but it is not in this sense that we are required to love our enemies. We are commanded to love our enemies only because it is our duty to love all men, and because our corrupt hearts are too apt to make the case of our enemies an exception from the general rule. Our love to all men (of course including our enemies) is required to be such as would lead us to do good to every individual, if we had opportunity ; but it must, from the nature of the case, consist in a general good will, rather than in a peculiar and distinguishing affection. Did Christian love to our enemies denote more than I now represent, it would be unnatural indeed, for it would be love to them on account of their being our enemies.

But the great difficulty may seem to remain. We cannot love our enemies without forgiving them ; and it is asked, Whether the forgiveness

of injuries be not, in some cases, incompatible with the condition of man, inconsistent with his dignity, with his interest, even with his personal safety.

One would think that men who are duly conscious of their own offences against God, and yet hope to be forgiven by him, should not be very confident or much at ease in maintaining such an argument ; but I do not the less desire to meet the question as it has now been stated.

Let us therefore settle, in the first place, what is to be understood by *forgiveness* on the part of one man towards another. For this term has, in some cases, a broad, and in others a limited signification ; and the extent of what it denotes is to be ascertained by the circumstances in which it is employed. Though in many cases we may exercise a forgiveness so complete, as to feel towards the person who injured us as if the injury had never been committed, there can be no doubt that it is necessary, in other cases, so far to remember the injury as to guard more effectually against a similar attack. There are cases in which it is necessary even to manifest our sense of injury, and, it may be, to renounce all intercourse with one whose persevering animosity would render our intercourse with him dangerous in the time to come. Yet all this can be no reason against our so forgiving him, and

so loving him, as to be willing to do him good, if circumstances should admit ; and in such a case as I have now supposed, more is not required. In such a case, Christian forgiveness is opposed only to that revenge which would prompt us either to render evil for evil, or to withhold from our enemy those good offices which may still be performed consistently with our own honour and safety.

Let it not be thought that I am, in this instance, so unfaithful to the doctrine of Christ, or using such freedom with the word of God, as to make it bend to the opinions of men. Most happily, for the satisfaction of every mind, our Divine Teacher has condescended to explain, both to limit and illustrate, the duty in question, with more care and precision than we find him employing on almost any other subject. “ If thy brother,” saith he, “ shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone : If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church : But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”*

* Matth. chap. xviii. ver. 15—17.

That absolute forgiveness, which leads to a renewal of wonted confidence, is thus required, only in the event of our brother, who had offended, being prevailed on to hear us—to hear and acknowledge the justice of our complaint against him. For the accomplishment, therefore, of this desirable purpose, we are instructed that no likely means should be left untried. But if our offending brother cannot be, in any way, reclaimed to a just sense of the wrong which he has done to us, we are directed to regard him as a man with whom it is not honourable or safe to have future intercourse. Though it is still our duty so to forgive him, and love him, as to be willing to do him good, if circumstances shall admit, he is to be to us what an heathen man and a publican were to the Jews—persons with whom they avoided to mingle in the ordinary intercourse of life.

Shall it, notwithstanding, be thought that the Christian precept of forgiving and loving our enemies, is unnatural in itself, or incapable of being reduced to practice? Is it necessary that I hate another merely on account of his hatred to me? Shall the most worthless individual of those around me have such a power over my heart, as to render it at his pleasure the victim of a hateful and corroding spirit? I shall only assert the proper dig-

nity of my nature, by preserving my own spirit meek and unruffled by his ; and if I can still, by any good deeds, promote his interest, I shall place myself, with respect to him, upon vantage-ground indeed ! If his heart be not impenetrable to all generous affection, it is possible that, in this way, he may still be reclaimed.

4. Perhaps some vindication may be expected of a precept more broad and comprehensive than any to which I have adverted,—the exhortation to be “ perfect, even as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect.” *

I do not believe that the real object and design of this precept are very generally mistaken. But when it can serve a purpose adverse to the Christian cause, what the precept requires is represented as impracticable, and on that account unreasonable.

It would be altogether preposterous to suppose that the precept in question has any reference to those attributes of the Divinity, which are the exclusive characteristics of an Infinite Being. Even power and wisdom, though they be faculties in

* Matth. chap. v. ver. 48.

respect of which the creatures of God are not altogether precluded from a resemblance of Him who created them, do not fall within the sphere of this precept. As the great object of religion is our advancement in *moral* perfection, the single object of the precept before us is a likeness to God in those affections of the heart, on which moral perfection depends ; and the exhortation is accordingly connected with a train of reasoning, which refers exclusively to morality in the heart and life.

It has, notwithstanding, been urged, that what Christ in this case requires is unreasonable, because the absolute perfection which belongs to the Divine Being is not, in any of its departments, attainable by man. But is it not possible to attain both a real and progressive likeness to God in his moral attributes, without attaining that absolute or infinite perfection, which is His prerogative ? Or is there any reason why Divine perfection, though in its degree unattainable by any finite being, may not be an example to us in respect of its constituent qualities ? May it not be held, on the contrary, that the absolute or entire perfection of the Divine character, renders it a more fit object even of our imperfect imitation ?

Absolute perfection is aimed at in every rule of

conduct which a teacher of morality prescribes. There is no precept, founded in essential rectitude, of which absolute perfection is not the object, within that sphere to which the precept extends. The same objection, therefore, which is urged against proposing the Divine character as an example to men, might, with equal reason, be urged against the whole, or any part, of the *Law*, which God hath given us. But, though perfect conformity to the law of God is, in our present state, unattainable, does it follow that perfect conformity to it should not be required by God, and aimed at by men? We are unable to keep ourselves altogether from iniquity. But does it follow that a certain measure of iniquity should be, for that reason, allowed by God, or that we should not be commanded by Him to abstain from *all* that is evil? When Christ exhorts us to be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect, he certainly requires us both to propose to ourselves a perfect standard, and to aim at the nearest possible resemblance to it; but it does by no means follow, that we have not profited by his exhortation, because we have failed of absolute or complete success. Our duty consists in a vigorous imitation of Divine perfection, productive of such a progressive, though imperfect, likeness to our Heavenly Father, as we know to be attainable by his children on earth.

We have in this way an advantage beyond what can be otherwise realized to us, in our endeavours after moral improvement. The import of moral precepts may be mistaken, owing to the uncertain and fluctuating import of the language in which they are expressed. But the man who has formed just conceptions of the Divine character, finds in it a standard of perfection by which he can never be deceived, by which every maxim or rule of duty may be safely tried and appreciated, and which only requires to be steadily kept in view, in order to its guiding and directing the willing mind to the highest attainments which our nature is destined to reach.

The example of our Heavenly Father, regarded as a rule of duty, has even the advantage of suggesting such a motive to the imitation of it as cannot be without effect. Our hearts must be altogether alienated from God if we do not feel it delightful to imitate him whom we have so much cause to love.

SECTION IV.

FROM ALL THE PRECEDING VIEWS OF THE GOSPEL, THERE ARISES
STRONG PRESUMPTIVE EVIDENCE OF ITS DIVINE ORIGIN.

WHILE the views which we have taken of the Christian doctrine were calculated to remove some objections to it, which originate with a perverted understanding, I trust that they have been effectual for convincing the reader of its perfect adaptation to all our spiritual wants and necessities.

As creatures ignorant of much that relates to the present condition of our nature, and even uncertain of our ultimate destination, it seems impossible that we should not hail with delight the glorious light which the Gospel casts on things which so materially concern us. As sinful creatures, liable to punishment from the hand of a Being of infinite justice, and also conscious of the reigning power and dominion of sin within us, it seems impossible that we should not rejoice in the assurance which the Gospel imparts, both of forgiving mercy to the penitent sinner, and of Divine grace to every man who sincerely desires and seeks

after it, for his deliverance from the power of iniquity, and his consequent preparation for everlasting felicity in the presence of his Heavenly Father.

What is there farther that can be desired by a man duly conscious of his spiritual disease, and of his wants as a spiritual being? Is it possible that they who are interested in such blessings should not regard the communication of them, through the Gospel of Christ, as altogether worthy of a Being of infinite goodness? It does not seem too much to suppose, that every man, who has a just sense of his condition by nature, should cling to the revelation of these things as a precious gift of Heaven,—as the anchor of his soul during his abode in the present world.

Yet let it not be supposed that it is in this respect alone that the views which we have taken of the Christian doctrine afford presumptive evidence of its Divine origin. The evidence is much strengthened by what we know respecting the condition of its Author, considered in connexion with what he taught and enjoined.

“ We speak wisdom,” said an Apostle, “ among them that are perfect, yet not the wisdom of this world.” It has never been pretended that the Author of Christianity frequented those schools in which the wisdom of the world was taught. Yet

we have seen that his doctrine affords a more consistent and satisfying view of many things pertaining to God, as well as to the condition and interests of men, than the wisdom of the world had attained. We have seen that the morality of his religion, in particular, far transcends, in point of purity and perfection, any rule of life which had been previously recognised. On what principle do we account for these things? Is there no ground to presume that the perfection which we thus trace, and which does not seem to have been of men, may be found to be of God?

It may, at least, be hoped that they who attend to the religion of Christ in this view, and observe how it approves itself to well-directed reason, will not regard it as the dream of a deluded mind.

What account of it, then, can be given, consistently with a denial of its divine origin? If it has neither proceeded from God, nor from any weak mind which was itself deluded, it must, of necessity, have been devised by an impostor, for the purpose of deluding others. This, accordingly, is the ground on which unbelievers have attacked it from the beginning. They have represented it as a deep-laid scheme for imposing on the world. Yet how are we to reconcile this account of the matter with what we have seen to be the fact,—That the Christian doctrine, and its morality in

particular, are, in many respects, directly opposed to the prejudices and inclinations of men, and, consequently, could afford no natural promise to their Author of advancing his credit or interest among men.

In those systems of religious doctrine and worship, which have been imposed on the world by the cunning and artifice of individuals, we observe—what was naturally to be expected—an artful accommodation both to the prejudices of a misinformed or perverted mind, and to the wishes of a corrupt heart. But in what department of the Christian doctrine do we trace any similar accommodation? In one view, the religion of Christ is well accommodated to the world; it is well accommodated to the wants and necessities of the world. But the wants and the wishes of men are often very opposite; some of the wants, to which the Christian doctrine is accommodated, are of a kind which the corrupt heart was unwilling to recognise—wants which it did not wish to be supplied.

Though we have seen that the *precepts* of the Gospel, in particular, are such as well-directed reason must approve, some of them are so obnoxious to the corrupt heart, that they were, from the beginning, pronounced by many to be hard sayings, which no man could bear. So far from their Au-

thor making any attempt, even to cover or disguise, in the first instance, what might appear peculiarly grievous, we have seen that the words which he employed, were, to say the least, as rigid as the duty which they were intended to denote. What an exemplification was it of *plain dealing*, to require of those who would come after him, (or, in other words, would become his disciples,) “to deny themselves, and take up their cross?” Was this the language of one who meant to cheat others into a profession of his religion? Was this the manner in which one regardless of truth, and only eager to promote his own aggrandisement, would have endeavoured to prevail on men to become his followers?

We might suppose a deluded and superstitious mind to have been willing to impose superstitious penances on others. But we have seen that the general character of the Gospel doctrine abundantly protects its Author against any charge of having been himself deluded; and what we now observe concerning some of his precepts, makes it equally impossible to suppose that he had any sinister scheme or design of alluring men to become his disciples, by deceitful views of what should be required of them.

Nor is it in this negative view alone that the peculiar precepts of the Gospel afford evidence of

their Author's sincerity ; they strongly indicate his own confidence in their divine origin.—Before Christ appeared in the world, the baneful effects, which had resulted from a spirit of hatred and revenge, were well known. But the deep root which this hateful spirit had gained in the human heart, and the seeming impossibility of convincing men that they ought so to love their enemies as to do them good, were enough to prevent heathen sages from inculcating strictly, if at all, the obligation of a truly forgiving spirit. An attempt to do so, would have been accounted by them more than enough to blast and defeat the best scheme of morality with which it might be connected. Nothing, therefore, but a consciousness of divine power accompanying his doctrine, could have induced the Author of the Christian faith to require such a spirit as indispensable in his disciples. Those attainments in charity, which he hath commanded us to aim at, could never have been contemplated by one who did not also anticipate that divine and all-powerful energy, by which a change so blessed was to be wrought out on the human heart.

Is it possible, in these circumstances, to account for what is new and peculiar in the Gospel-doctrine, as a rule of both faith and practice, upon

any other supposition than that of its having proceeded from God? Was its Author uneducated in “the wisdom of this world?” Did he, notwithstanding, undertake to instruct and satisfy our minds respecting both the present condition of our nature, and our ultimate destination? Do we find that his doctrine on this subject, though at first it seem liable to objections, only requires to be deliberately considered and examined, in order to its approving itself to our reason? Do we find that his precepts also, as a rule of life, are more conducive to the perfection of our nature, than all that the wisest and best of men had previously devised? Does this view of the Gospel prevent the possibility of our rejecting it as the dream of an ignorant enthusiast? Has its Author, at the same time, placed the honesty of his design out of question, by rigidly inculcating precepts which were so obnoxious to the corrupt heart as to give no natural promise of advancing his reputation and interest in the world,—even so obnoxious as to forbid any hope of their being accepted by men, otherwise than through the blessed influence of the Spirit of all Grace, whom he, at the same time, revealed as co-operating with himself in the work of our salvation?—If, to these questions, the answer of the reader be what *my* mind directs me to anticipate, there seems to be no way of accounting

for what we have traced as peculiar in the Gospel of Christ, without presuming that it comes from God.

Trusting that the views of the Gospel, which I have thus presented, may induce the reader to give a candid, if not a favourable, attention to its more direct evidences, I proceed to submit these evidences to his consideration; and shall, in the first place, endeavour to shew, that the Gospel history is entitled to our confidence as a record of facts not miraculous, in order to our afterwards appealing to these facts as affording evidence of the reality of the Christian miracles.

CHAPTER II.

THE GOSPEL HISTORY IS SUPPORTED BY EVIDENCE WHICH
WELL ENTITLES US TO CONFIDE IN IT AS A NARRATIVE
OF FACTS, SO FAR AS THEY ARE NOT MIRACULOUS.

THE establishment of this proposition is the foundation of all the direct proof by which the reality of Christ's miracles can be fairly and effectually maintained. Yet, so far as regards *historical evidence* for the truth of the Gospel narrative, I have the satisfaction of thinking that my labour may be safely abridged ; for, though the historical evidence has not been applied by some authors in the way which appears to me most logical and conclusive, there has been such a mass of it brought forward by the advocates of the Christian cause, as must be more than sufficient to answer every reasonable demand.

But there are also internal marks or indications of either truth or falsehood, which every narrative more or less possesses. False documents, taking

to themselves the name of history, may contain such internal evidence of falsehood, as makes it preposterous to think of establishing their truth. There may be others of an equivocal character ; and there certainly are some in which all the internal and essential indications of truth are so strong, as to give greater and more perfect effect to the direct testimony by which they are supported. If the Gospel history be of this last description, its character in that respect ought to be illustrated, in the first place, as tending still farther to modify the task of establishing its truth by direct and positive evidence. I shall, therefore, begin with inquiring what indications of either truth or falsehood present themselves on the face of the evangelical record.

SECTION I.

THE GOSPEL HISTORY AFFORDS MUCH INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF
ITS OWN TRUTH.

WITH a view to illustrate this proposition, let us attend to the more prominent indications of truth or falsehood which any historical document may be supposed to present.

1. The *consistency* of a narrative is essential to the confidence which we repose in it.

A narrative may be chargeable with such inconsistencies as render it impossible for us to believe one part of it without disbelieving another. On the other hand, consistency may amount, in some cases, to more than a negative recommendation. By a strict examination of a narrative, we may perceive consistency in such trying circumstances, as not only preclude the possibility of its being the effect of study or precaution, but afford strong presumptive evidence of its being the simple result of a natural and habitual adherence to truth.

What I have now supposed may be realized in

the course of comparing one part with another of the same narrative ; but, if different authors have furnished us with separate narratives, bearing on the same subject, and if their mutual consistency be essential to our acknowledging the truth of all or either of them, it is manifest that a field is thereby opened for such a severe trial, as renders it highly probable that we may either detect the falsehood of the whole, or acquire some moral evidence of an undeviating regard to truth, in those from whom the narratives in question proceed.

This hypothetical case is practically exemplified in the Gospel history.—Four individuals (each professing to have a perfect knowledge of the circumstances) have given us four separate accounts of the life of Christ. They are so different from one another, that the last, in particular, (that of the Evangelist John,) contains but little of what had been recorded by those who preceded him. Yet, instead of any real inconsistencies having been detected by the most scrutinizing eye, it is found that those circumstances, in the different narratives, which at first sight bear an *appearance* of inconsistency, only furnish us with presumptive evidence of both the simplicity and integrity of the men by whom they were respectively written.

If the four narratives of the life of Christ had borne such a resemblance to each other, in respect

of both the circumstances recorded, and the language employed, as to make it impossible for any man to bring forward a plausible *allegation* of inconsistency, it would have amounted, in the view of a discerning mind, to something like evidence of mutual consultation on the part of those concerned—of such artful design (though it might be for a good purpose) as must have impaired the confidence which we may otherwise repose in them. When, on the contrary, we observe any seeming discrepance in respect of either language or circumstances, and yet find it effectually removed by a very natural explanation—when we find that, notwithstanding such appearances of discrepance, the most acute and determined adversaries of the Christian faith have not been able, in any one instance, to establish a charge of real inconsistency, it may well have the effect of satisfying our minds that each of the Evangelists must have written with a single desire of recording the truth,—with less concert and worldly wisdom than what may in some cases be useful,—but with such perfect confidence in his own integrity, as resulted from the testimony of a good conscience.

2. A narrative may present to its readers more particular evidence that its author could not be

actuated by any sinister design, or any other purpose than what is avowed.

Deliberate falsehood has its origin most frequently in a design to promote some worldly interest of those by whom it is propagated. If a narrative contain nothing that can tend to the worldly advantage of its author, it has so far a claim to attention ;—if it has plainly an opposite tendency, a tendency in any sense disadvantageous to the person from whom it proceeds, and of which he must himself have been conscious, we have some presumptive evidence of its truth.

What is, in this respect, the character of the Gospel history? Does it contain any thing by which its authors could reasonably hope to promote their worldly interest?

Two of them were Apostles of Christ ; and they do not deny that, in attaching themselves to his cause, they were originally actuated by worldly views ; they confess that, in this respect, they were much disappointed. But does such a confession savour of any renewed scheme of worldly ambition ?—(most assuredly it could not aid such a scheme)—Or is there any thing in the account which they give of their Master's life and doctrine,

by which they might hope to gain the co-operation of worldly men in measures for their own advancement in the world? It is manifest that the whole tenor of what they wrote, could only expose them to the contempt of men who were actuated by worldly views, if it did not subject them to the hatred and enmity of some whose interests were likely to be affected.

If worldly reputation, more particularly, was their object, what means did they employ for acquiring it? Two of them (as I have already said) were of the number of Christ's more immediate associates;—what do we find in *their* writings calculated to advance the credit or reputation of that body of men—the apostolic family—to which they belonged? Was this object to be accomplished by an avowal of their own original misapprehensions of their Master's doctrine,—of the doubts which they had entertained of his power,—the contentions which prevailed among themselves,—the baseness of one of their number who had betrayed him,—the weakness of another who had denied him,—the meanness and cowardice which they had all manifested by forsaking him in the hour of trial?

The prejudices or preconceived opinions of an historian, may influence him to frame his narrative in a way calculated to establish and maintain these

opinions. But all the prejudices or preconceived opinions of the authors of the Gospel history were directly opposed to the doctrine of Christ. As Jews, they had, in common with their countrymen, expected the Messiah to establish a temporal kingdom. Their Master, on the contrary, instructed them that his kingdom was not to be of this world; and the whole doctrine which he taught was accommodated to a spiritual design. So far from their having any prejudices in favour of his doctrine, which could induce them to misrepresent the truth, it is manifest that they had strong prejudices against it, which it was necessary for them to surmount, before they could, in their hearts, so receive what he taught, as to be prepared to do it justice in any communication to others.

Shall it be supposed that, after having become attached to their Master and his cause, they may have perverted the truth for the purpose of advancing *his* honour? I shall not deny the *possibility*, that a man who rises superior to all undue regard to his own worldly interest and reputation, —who even rises superior to all undue confidence in his own preconceived opinions,—may still be tempted to pervert the truth for advancing the honour of another. Far less would I deny that the honour of Christ was eminently dear to those

who have furnished us with the history of his life. But is there any thing on the face of the Gospel record, to warrant a suspicion that its authors were disposed to employ any means for promoting his honour, beyond a simple and faithful narrative of what they had seen and heard? If they are to be suspected of having employed other and undue means for this purpose, how comes it that they appear to have been altogether neglectful of what they might have fairly and honourably done for its accomplishment,—neglectful of what they might have done, without any violation of truth, and what other men, in the same outward circumstances, certainly would have done? How comes it that, in recording the transactions of their Master's life, not a word ever escapes from them, expressive of their admiration of either the power, or the wisdom, or the goodness, which he manifested? Or how comes it that, in narrating those facts and circumstances, on which the enemies of their Master were most likely to found an accusation against him, we do not once find them accompanying their statement with such an apology for the part which he had acted, or such an explanation of it, as their intimate acquaintance with all the circumstances might have enabled them to suggest? It is morally impossible to account for

these things upon any principle short of admitting, that it was their single object to bear a faithful testimony, leaving it to a higher power to control the purposes which were to be served by it.

We cannot, indeed, attend to the Gospel history in the views already presented, without perceiving that one of its peculiar features is *simplicity*; nor will it be found an easy matter, in any case, to reconcile this characteristic with a sinister design. But in adverting to the simplicity of the Gospel narrative, I am well entitled to take high ground. For not only is simplicity one of its distinguishing features, there is no history extant that may, in this respect, be at all compared with it. Its simplicity is not only exemplified in certain remarkable instances, but so pervades the whole, that there is not a single case in which an opposite feature can be traced.

Much of the simplicity of a narrative consists in the author's attention being confined to the facts which he narrates, exclusive of whatever is either personal to himself, or intended to recommend what he writes to the approbation of others. Now, two of the authors of the Gospel history, being of the number of Christ's immediate associates, were themselves deeply concerned in the facts which they narrated; yet it would be diffi-

cult to discover from the tenor of their narrative, that they had any personal interest in the matter, —either in the honour which it reflected on those concerned, or in the responsibility which it imposed on them. All the Evangelists must have been aware that, so far as circumstances should admit, their veracity would be called in question by the enemies of their Master ; yet we do not find them making any protestations of their own truth and integrity, or any appeal to the impossibility of their having been actuated by worldly views. It was natural that they should refer to the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah, as fulfilled in the person of Jesus ; and had they been actuated by worldly wisdom, they would have been likely to bring forward some laboured argument on this subject, instead of adhering to the single duty of recording what they had seen and heard. But how do we find them proceeding ? In narrating particular events, they do occasionally refer to particular prophecies which, in these events, received their fulfilment. But with what simplicity is the reference made ! There is no argument employed to convince their countrymen either that the prophecies in question did not admit of a different interpretation, or that the general appearance and character of their

Master were conformable to what the Law and the Prophets had given them cause to expect.

How are we to account for such unexampled silence,—for such abstinence from the use of all the means which others would have employed for vindicating and maintaining either their own honour, or that of the cause in which they were engaged? One answer may be given, which meets the question in its full extent. They felt it to be their duty, as I have already hinted, to record those things of which they had been eye and ear-witnesses, but were convinced that, in doing so, they did all that was incumbent on them, and all that they were warranted to undertake. When their conduct, viewed in all its bearings, shall be accounted for on a different principle, we may then, but not till then, lose the benefit of a strong presumptive argument in favour of their truth and integrity.

3. A narrative may present much internal evidence of its own truth, arising from the facility which it affords for the detection of any falsehood which it may be supposed to contain.

By a very general statement of facts, real or pretended,—by a statement which makes no distinct reference to accompanying circumstances,—

an author may, in a great measure, put it out of the power of others to form a judgment of the truth or falsehood of what he writes. The more numerous and specific, on the other hand, that such references are, the more does he lay open the whole case to the examination and judgment of the world,—the more does he facilitate and invite such inquiry as may enable all men to ascertain what credit is due to him. It is not, therefore, easy to suppose that the specifications in question should be very liberally given, by an author who is not conscious of the truth of what he is recording.

Proceeding upon this ground, what may we naturally presume or anticipate respecting the veracity of the authors of the Gospel history? Do they appear to have written like men confident of the truth of what they narrated, and consequently not afraid of any trial to which it might be exposed?

I doubt whether there be any other history in which all the circumstances of time and place, together with the names and designations of eye-witnesses and others concerned, are detailed with a minuteness so strongly indicating a single and earnest desire that all men should have it in their power to ascertain the truth. I also doubt whe-

ther it be possible to account for this distinguishing characteristic of the Gospel narrative, in any way consistent with a supposition of its falsehood.

If the *date* of an event be not duly recorded, it becomes impracticable to make any inquiry into the truth of what the author of the narrative asserts. It may, or may not, have happened ; for we are left in a state of irremediable ignorance respecting all that could enable us to make trial of the authenticity of his statements. But to give the reader of the Gospel history the utmost advantage in this respect, he is referred to circumstances which distinctly mark and ascertain the dates of those great events with which others in their order are immediately connected. He is not even left in perplexity arising from the different ways in which time has been calculated, and its periods denominated, in different countries ; he is referred to circumstances which serve, in the view of all men, to fix the date of the events in question,—such as the name of the existing Emperor of Rome, and the year of his reign,—the names of the Roman Governors of Judea and Galilee,—and the name of the person who was, for the time, High Priest of Jerusalem.

An author who does not specify distinctly the

place which was the scene of what he records, puts it out of the power of his reader (even supposing him nearly contemporary with the event) to satisfy himself, by an examination of either living witnesses, or traditionary evidence. But, in almost every instance, the Evangelists have described the place to which the event in question is referred, with a degree of minuteness obviously and wisely intended to facilitate the strictest inquiry into the evidence of what they narrate. In most instances, the particular district or neighbourhood, the particular town or village, the mount or the garden—in some cases the particular house—is recorded with such precision as plainly tended to invite inquiry.

A want of the *names and designations* of the persons, to whom reference is made, might still have gone far to obstruct the requisite investigation. But no such want could be felt by those who, at the time of the first publication of the life of Christ, endeavoured to ascertain its truth or falsehood. The names and occupations of his family and connexions—of his more immediate and constant associates—of others with whom he had occasional intercourse, some of them personally interested in the most remarkable transactions of his life, and some of them in the higher ranks of society,—even

the names and designations of the more distinguished of his enemies and persecutors—are all given in a way which must have tended to facilitate inquiry, and which plainly indicates the absence of either reserve or disguise—the absence of whatever is inconsistent with truth.

If the Gospel history had not been written till the alleged witnesses of what is recorded had been laid in the grave,—till even the memory of circumstances which might have contradicted it, had been nearly lost ; or, though written by contemporaries of Christ, had it been carefully locked up from the view of the world till the late period to which I now refer, I admit that the facilities which it affords for the detection of falsehood must have proved in a great measure illusory. But, with all its unreserved specification of the most minute circumstances of time and place, together with the names and designations of witnesses and others concerned, we shall find, in the next Section, that it was published to the world while many of the eye and ear-witnesses of what is recorded—both friends and enemies of Christ—were still alive, and consequently while his enemies had it fully in their power both to inquire into and expose any falsehood which his friends might have attempted to impose on the world.

SECTION II.

THE GOSPEL HISTORY WAS PUBLISHED AT A TIME WHEN THE JEWISH RULERS WERE IN FULL POSSESSION OF THE MEANS OF DETECTING AND EXPOSING ANY FALSEHOOD WHICH IT MIGHT HAVE CONTAINED ;—YET NO CONFUTATION OF IT APPEARED.

THE existence of many ancient manuscripts of those books, which constitute the Gospel history, does of itself refer us to a period of remote antiquity, as the date of their publication. The existence, also, of versions or translations of these books into languages which, for many ages, have ceased to be spoken in the world, authorises us to look back to a more definite time, at which the originals must have existed. Nor is this all the evidence of the same kind. A recent author, in alluding to the circumstances now mentioned, has judiciously added, that the peculiar idiom of the Greek tongue, in which the New Testament is written, affords decisive evidence of its coming from men of Hebrew origin. These circumstances certainly go far to *countenance* the supposition that the different books of the Gospel history were written and published by the men to whom

they have been always ascribed, and consequently before the close of the Apostolic age.

But how comes it that any doubt is entertained (if entertained it actually be) about the books in question having been the genuine production of their supposed authors? The names of the authors have been handed down to us in connexion with the writings respectively ascribed to them. There is nothing contained in the books themselves which we may not naturally suppose to have been written by the men to whom they are ascribed; nor has any conflicting claim to the authorship been urged.

Two of these books, at the same time, give us information respecting their authors. In the beginning of the Gospel ascribed to Luke, the author informs us that "he had perfect understanding of all things" (about which he was to write) "from the very first."* It can scarcely be doubted that he refers, in these words, to such personal knowledge as indicates that he was a contemporary of Christ and his Apostles. We accordingly find the same author, in his History of the Acts of the Apostles, employing such language as evidently denotes that he was himself concerned in some

* Luke, chap. i. ver. 3.

of the events which he narrates. We also find, that in the Gospel ascribed to John, the author represents himself as having been a personal witness of the crucifixion. "He that saw it," says he, "bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe."* These will be found important circumstances; but, in reference to the last case, we have something more explicit. In the conclusion of the Gospel by John, the author announces himself as plainly as if he had recorded his name. Alluding to a designation by which he had been known, and under which he had immediately before spoken of himself, he says,—“This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things.”†

Now, what is the precise value of this testimony? Supposing that we shall find other evidence to satisfy us that the books of the Gospel history are, in the ordinary sense of the term, genuine documents, we shall have the advantage, in regard to two of these books, that the requisite information respecting their authors forms a part of the record itself; and, consequently, every argument by which we prove the authenticity of the record, will be equally conclusive in regard to its authors.

* John, chap. xix. ver. 35.

† Ibid. chap. xxi. ver. 24.

Yet let it not be supposed that the light which may be desired respecting the authors of the books in question, is by any means indispensable ; for, when we shall have proved that the Gospel history, by whomsoever it was written, was published during the Apostolic age, the establishment of this proposition alone will enable us to bring forward, in all its force, the great ultimate question, Why that history was not confuted at the time by the enemies of Christ, to whom the falsehood, if it had existed, must have been known ?

By what means, then, shall we more fully ascertain that the Gospel history was published during the Apostolic age ?

In the Gospel which is ascribed to Luke, the author begins with an explicit reference to historical treatises on the same subject, which had been previously written by others. "Forasmuch," says he, "as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as *they* delivered them unto us, who, from the beginning, were eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word, it seemed good to me also," &c.*

* Luke, chap. i. ver. 1—3.

In this passage the expression *many* forbids us to understand Luke as referring *exclusively* to any books denominated Gospels, which are now contained in the volume of the New Testament ; for, altogether, they are not many. But there can be no doubt that he had in his eye some well-known publications, containing an account of the life and doctrine, as well as the death and resurrection, of Christ ; for less cannot be understood as denoted by “ the things most surely believed.”

If the testimony of Luke, then, is to be respected, much of the substance of the Gospel history, whether written by inspired men, or by fallible authors, had been published before he wrote his Treatise on the same subject ; and it cannot be supposed that, upon this point, he declared what he did not know to be true ; for it was morally impossible that, in reference to this point, he could succeed in imposing a falsehood on others. All men into whose hands his own book came, must have known whether the multifarious writings on the same subject, to which he referred, had or had not an existence.

If it be contended that the Gospel of Luke itself may not have been published at the time when it professes to have been written, Can they who maintain this position assign the publication of his Gospel to any other period, at which the non-ex-

istence of the writings to which he refers would not still have proved fatal to his own credit as an author? One would think that a book, containing such explicit reference to many publications which had never existed, could not be given to the world at any time with much safety. But if it shall, notwithstanding, be alleged, that in some dark age, a man, eager to accomplish a deception, may have taken his hazard of such a publication, I desire to ask, why he should have taken any such hazard of what was not necessary to the accomplishment of his deceitful purpose? For it is not easy, on the one hand, to perceive what deceitful advantage he was to gain by such a false reference; nor is it possible, on the other hand, to account for his making an *unnecessary* reference, in a way so marked and unequivocal, to many publications which had never existed, and about which inquiry might still be made.

Yet if we suppose that the narratives to which Luke refers had been published at the time when his Gospel is understood to have been written, it is manifest that these narratives alone (for they were narratives of the “things most surely believed” among Christians) made it indispensable for the enemies of Christ to refute what they contained, if it was at all in their power to refute them.

Were there any lack of evidence for our present purpose, perhaps much might be made of this argument ; but we have evidence for the early publication of the Gospel history, in its nature so direct and conclusive, as to supersede the necessity of such reasoning.

What sort of evidence is it that will, in this case, satisfy a discriminating and candid mind ? This question is both natural and important ; for, in the case before us, we are not allowed to derive the requisite conclusion from what has proved satisfactory respecting other publications. The dates of other publications have been held as unquestionable, perhaps upon little other evidence than that of their title-pages ; or, with more reason, upon reference to the age or the era of their alleged authors, taken in connexion with such allusions in the books themselves, as served to mark the age in which they had been written. But, in regard to the Gospel history, more evidence is called for ; and, from the nature of the case, it seems impossible that the additional evidence should be any other than that of personal testimony—testimony direct or indirect—to the *existence* of the Gospel history, at the period of its alleged publication.

In answering, however, the demand for such evidence as that in question, it may be useful to keep in mind the particular reason why it seems to be desired. No man denies that the Gospel history has been *for a long time* in the hands of those who have called themselves Christians ; but it is supposed possible that, instead of having been published during the age of its professed authors, it may have been brought out at a subsequent era, and artfully imposed on the world as an early publication, which had been somehow neglected or forgotten. I am not answerable for any absurdity there may be in this supposition ; I desire to meet the supposition, because it is the only one upon which it can be maintained that the Gospel history was not published at the early period to which I am concerned to assign it.

Now, it so happens that, during the times which immediately succeeded the age of the Apostles, and downward to the present day, there is such a superabundance of the testimony desired as precludes the possibility of supposing that the Gospel history had not been published within much less than a hundred years after the death of Christ. I might, therefore, circumscribe and reduce to a very short period the time within which an imposition like that in question could be attempted. But it is not necessary to leave any chasm whatever in the evi-

dence ; for we shall find references to the *existence* of the evangelical record in writings which were published even before the close of the Apostolic age.

Considering the Gospel history as comprehending separate treatises on the same subject, proceeding from different individuals, and bearing evidence that, in the first instance, they were separately published, the different authors may be fairly regarded as giving credible testimony to one another ; and when we consider, farther, how many of the facts recorded by the Evangelists are also adverted to in the Apostolic Epistles, which, though now comprised in the volume of the New Testament, bear evidence of having been originally transmitted, at different periods, to different Christian churches throughout the civilized world, it seems impossible to disregard the testimony which so many separate authors must be understood as bearing—each to the writings of another. Nor is it possible to deny that this testimony extends to the *date* of the publications in question, as indicated by much of their own language and import ; for no book which is not an imposture can be supposed to assign to itself a false date.

The next testimony which may be expected is

that of contemporaries of the Apostles and Evangelists. But it is scarcely to be supposed that we should have testimony on this subject from men of that day, who were adversaries of Christ and his cause ; for, unless such men had found it in their power to deny and confute the Gospel history, it was obviously their wisdom to be silent respecting it. Consequently the laws of evidence require us to be satisfied with the only testimony which, from the nature of the case, could be expected.

What *sort* of testimony, then, to the existence of the Gospel history are we to receive from friends of the Christian cause, who lived at the time of its alleged publication? It is not, surely, to be expected that we are to find them bearing witness in any formal way to the existence of that history, as if its existence had been, at the time, a questionable matter. Were such testimony produced, we should have good cause to reject it, as presenting internal evidence of its own falsehood. Supposing the history of the life of Christ to have been published by various authors at the time alleged, no man, either friend or foe, would anticipate such a case as that its publication, or the date of it, should be afterwards denied. We cannot, therefore, look for a direct and formal testimony to any such fact. But if we have in our possession the writings of contemporary authors, who took a

friendly interest in the Christian cause, we may naturally search them for some *allusions*, more or less direct, to the Gospel history, as previously published, either in whole or in part; and if such allusions shall be found, the less formal and intentional that they appear, the more satisfying evidence shall we have that there has been no fraudulent design.

Keeping these considerations in view, I would now refer the reader to the writings of some individuals who are ordinarily denominated *Apostolical Fathers*, because they lived during the age of the Apostles.

1. *Clement*, who is mentioned by Paul as his fellow-labourer,* and is well known to have been Bishop of the Christian Church at Rome, wrote an Epistle to the Church at Corinth, of which we are in possession; and there can be no reasonable doubt of its being genuine, for there is mention made of it by many of the fathers of the second century, and particularly by Dionysius, who was himself Bishop of Corinth, within less than a hundred years after the epistle in question had been received by the church over which he presi-

ded.—Among a variety of allusions in that epistle to the Gospel history, as already published, we find some quotations of the sayings of Christ, as recorded by Matthew and Luke. “Especially remembering,” says Clement, “the words of the Lord Jesus which he spake, touching long suffering and gentleness ; for thus he said, *Be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy ; forgive, that it may be forgiven unto you ; as ye do, so shall it be done unto you ; as ye give, so shall it be given unto you ; as ye judge, so shall ye be judged ; as ye show kindness, so shall kindness be showed unto you ; with what measure ye mete, with the same shall it be measured unto you.*” * If, upon comparing this passage with the corresponding passages in the Gospel of Matthew and that of Luke, † we were still to entertain a doubt of Clement having referred to the language of these Evangelists, we should at least feel ourselves under a necessity of admitting that the sayings of Christ, to which he does refer, had been, in one way or other, recorded ; for he does not impart them to the Corinthians as any thing new, he only desires them to remember the words, on the supposition that they were already acquainted with them.—Still

* Clement, Ep. chap. xiii.

† Matth. chap. v. ver. 7 ; chap. vii. ver. 1, 2. Luke, chap. vi. ver. 37, 38.

more precise and definite, however, is the reference which Clement makes, in the same Epistle, to the language of Paul. Many important facts of the Gospel history had been recorded by Paul in his Epistles, and not a few in his first Epistle addressed to the Corinthians, the very men to whom Clement was writing. It was impossible that Clement could deceive the Corinthians about either the existence or the contents of an epistle, which, if it did exist, must have been in their own possession. Yet we not only find him referring to the First Epistle to the Corinthians, but explicitly mentioning its author by name. "Take into your hands," says he, "the Epistle of the blessed Paul the Apostle. What did he at first write unto you, in the beginning of the Gospel? Verily, he did, by the Spirit, admonish you concerning himself, and Cephas, and Apollos, because that even then you did form parties."*

2. *Polycarp* was appointed by the Apostles Bishop of the Christian Church at Smyrna; and of his writings, there is still extant a Letter to the Church at Philippi, which has been so much referred to by succeeding authors, as to place its authenticity out of question. Dr Lardner calculates

* Chap. xlvii. 1 Cor. chap. i. ver. 12.

that, in that Letter, there are more than twenty allusions to passages of the New Testament ; and not a few of them, I may add, are quotations from the Gospel history. The language of the Gospels, in particular, seems to be quoted, in order to his impressing it on the *memory* of his readers ; for he introduces his quotations in the same way which we have observed in the case of Clement ;—" Remembering," says he, " what the Lord said, teaching, *Judge not, that ye be not judged ; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven ; be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy ; with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*"* The author, indeed, seems to speak of the writings of inspired men as already collected into one sacred volume, which, in one passage, he denominates "*the oracles of the Lord,*" and in another, "*the Holy Scriptures.*" Whosoever," says he, " perverts *the oracles of the Lord* to his own lusts, he is the first-born of Satan ;"† and again, " I trust that ye are well exercised in *the Holy Scriptures.*"‡

3. Perhaps the references which I have thus made to two out of the number of the Apostolical Fathers might suffice for our present purpose ; but I am unwilling to omit altogether the testimony of

* Letter, chap. ii. Luke, chap. vi. ver. 38.

† Chap. vii.

‡ Chap. xii.

Papias. Some doubt, indeed, has been expressed, whether he had been personally conversant with any of the Apostles. But, as it is certain that he was a companion of Polycarp, I cannot be far wrong when I assign his testimony to the close of the Apostolic age. He makes the most explicit reference to Matthew and Mark, as authors of the Gospel history. Of the latter, in particular, he says—"Mark, being the interpreter of Peter, writ exactly whatever he remembered; but not in the order in which things were spoken or done by Christ;" and again, "This one thing he made his care—to omit nothing which he had heard, and to say nothing false in what he related." *

I think every candid mind will admit that those testimonies to the early publication of the Gospel history, which I have thus selected, are as strong as could have been looked for, from the writings of men in the Apostolic age, or even at its immediate close. It was not, during this period, that we were likely to find very numerous and detailed references to the Christian Scriptures. A multitude of such references is the natural result of controversy, respecting either the doctrine or the authority of the books in question. But, respect-

* Eusebius, Eccl. Hist. lib. iii. chap. 39.

ing the *doctrine* of the Gospel, there could not be much controversial discussion during the age of the Apostles ; for their interpretation of it must have been sustained by the great body of true Christians as infallible ; and so reserved were the adversaries of Christianity during the same period, that there was no controversy about the *authority* of what its friends had published.

The close of the Apostolic age produced, in these respects, a great change. While many learned men, in succession, now earnestly endeavoured, by the number and variety of their writings, to compensate the world for the removal, by death, of those who could speak of Christ as one whom they had seen and heard,—not a few of the most eminent devoted their labour, more particularly, to such controversial vindication of either the truth or the purity of the Christian faith, as kept the Gospel history continually in their view. Yet I do not, on this account, feel myself under obligation to bring forward many such witnesses. While I refer men, who have leisure for the investigation, to the indefatigable *Lardner*, for the testimony of more than a hundred authors subsequent to the Apostolic age, I am confident that, to ordinary minds, the early publication of the Gospel history—which is the only point at present in question—

may be placed out of doubt, by a selection of *three* out of a number so overwhelming. I am the more confident, because, owing to the authors whom I shall quote having been engaged in controversy, we shall have, in two cases out of the three, the singular advantage of their own testimony being confirmed by that of their controversial opponents, as adversaries to the Christian cause.

1. Not more than thirty or forty years subsequent to the Apostolic age, we have *Justin Martyr*. This great man had passed through various schools of philosophy before he became a Christian. He was, therefore, the better qualified, after his conversion, to render eminent service to the cause of Christ. Amidst a variety of useful works which are adverted to by succeeding authors, he wrote two Apologies for the Christian Faith, addressed to successive Emperors of Rome. In these the quotations from the Gospel history are numerous. In one passage,* he says,—“The Apostles, in the Memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered it—That *Jesus commanded them to take bread and give thanks*.” In another place, he adds,—“In the Commentaries, which, as I have said, were composed by the

* Apol. I. p. 98.

Apostles and their followers, it is writ, That *his sweat fell like drops of blood*, as he prayed, saying, *If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*" * And again, addressing himself to the Emperor on the subject of Christian worship, he says,—“The Memoirs of the Apostles, or the writings of the Prophets, are read, according as the time allows; and when the reader has ended, the president makes a discourse, exhorting to the imitation of so excellent things.” †

The expression, “*Memoirs which are called Gospels*,” will not fail to be observed by the discerning reader as a most appropriate description of the writings of the four Evangelists.

But there is another of Justin's works, from which we may derive evidence still more to our purpose; for (as I have previously hinted) it is evidence from an adversary combined with his own. Among his works which are extant, there is an account, or narrative, in two parts, of a dialogue, or controversial debate, which he maintained with *Trypho*, a Jew, respecting the truth of Christianity;—And in that dialogue, Trypho says to Justin,—“The precepts in your Gospel, as it is called, are so great and wonderful, that I think it

* Lardner, Cred. edit. 1748. Part ii. vol. i. p. 268.

† Ibid. p. 269.

impossible for any man to keep them ; for I have been at the pains to read them.” *

Unless it shall be maintained that the writings ascribed to Justin are throughout a forgery, it is impossible to doubt the authenticity of what he quotes as the words of Trypho ; for they amount to an observation which Justin could not at the time have any motive to record, but that of being faithful in what he narrated. Yet Trypho, an unbelieving Jew, here presents himself as a witness, —beyond question disinterested,—to the early publication of the Gospel history.

2. *Irenæus*, though he had not seen the Apostles, was in his youth acquainted with some who had been intimately conversant with them. He may, therefore, be fairly classed with Justin Martyr, as one whose testimony, in respect of its date, stands very near to the period at which the Gospel history is alleged to have been published ; and he is referred to by subsequent authors in a way which imparts to his writings all the sanction for their authenticity that can be desired.

There are not, indeed, extant any writings of Irenæus in opposition to the avowed adversaries of the Christian faith ; but there are preserved, of

* Lardner, *Cred.* Part ii. vol. i. p. 269.

his composition, five books, in which he combats heretical teachers ; and, in one of these, we find a passage, in which he bears testimony to the publication of the Gospel history by its respective authors, in language which is *fortuitously* so decisive, that I should think it unwise to add even a word of comment to the following quotation.*—“ We have not received,” says he, “ the knowledge of the way of our salvation, by any others than those by whom the Gospel has been brought to us. Which Gospel they first preached, and afterwards by the will of God committed to writing, that it might be, for time to come, the pillar and foundation of our faith. For, after our Lord arose from the dead, and they (the apostles) were endowed from above with the power of the Holy Ghost coming down upon them, they received a perfect knowledge of all things. They then went forth to all the ends of the earth, declaring to men the blessing of heavenly peace, having all of them, and every one alike, the Gospel of God. Matthew then, among the Jews, wrote a Gospel in their own language, while Peter and Paul were preaching the Gospel at Rome, and founding a church there. And after their exit, Mark also, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, delivered to us in writing the

* Book iii. chap. i.

things that had been preached by Peter. And Luke, the companion of Paul, put down in a book the Gospel that had been preached by him. Afterwards John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned upon his breast, he likewise published a Gospel, while he dwelt at Ephesus in Asia.”

3. A short interval of time brings us to the last author whose testimony in this case I propose to quote ; and, when I mention the name of *Origen*, no learned reader will think lightly of our concluding witness. The very number of his writings would of itself throw ridicule on the idea of their being a forgery : It has been somewhere observed, with justice, that as well might all the writings ascribed to Cicero be pronounced a forgery.

Origen’s quotations of Scripture are so numerous, that they would, of themselves, prove the early publication, not of the Gospels alone, but of very nearly all the books which compose the volume of the New Testament. He refers to the four Gospels, in particular, as “ received without dispute by the whole Church of God under Heaven.”*—Yet more valuable still for our present purpose is one peculiar remark of this author, for which we are indebted to the circumstance of his

* Euseb. Eccl. Hist. lib. vi. chap. 25.

having been engaged in controversy with Celsus, an Epicurean philosopher. It might perhaps have been pretended (had there been no opposing testimony) that the Gospel history, however early published, was so little known or read, as to account in some measure for its not being denied or confuted. But, instead of there being ground for such a pretence, we find Origen introducing a passage from the New Testament with the very singular and pointed remark, that “it is written, not in any private books, or such as are read by a few only, and those studious persons, but in books read by every body.”*

Nor is it a small advantage which we derive from Origen’s antagonist in the controversy. The language of Celsus, as a bitter enemy of the Christian faith, is sufficient, of itself, to prove the early publication of the Gospel history. He makes explicit mention of things “which were written by the disciples of Jesus,” and alleges, that “some of the believers, through a kind of inebriation, think it is allowable for them to alter the Gospel.”† There is here, no doubt, a heavy charge brought against some false or heretical teachers of the infant church; but, supposing the charge against

* Origen, *Cont. Cels.* lib. vii. p. 720.

† Celsus, *Book II.* p. 77, as quoted by Origen.

them to be well founded, it does not, in the least degree, weaken the testimony of Celsus to the only point now in question—his testimony to the important fact, that the publication of the Gospel history had taken place at the time to which Christians assign it.

In the face of such testimonies, it is impossible for any mind to deny the early publication of the Gospel history, without proceeding on the supposition that the writings to which I have referred are forgeries. But, if such a supposition be admitted in the present case, how is a supposition of forgery to be obviated or prevented in any historical case whatever? If, after having proved the authenticity of certain books, so far as regards their publication at a given era, by references to contemporary and subsequent writings, we be next required to prove the authenticity of the writings to which we have, for this purpose, referred,—where is the demand for such proof to end? All that can be reasonably desired is, that the writings referred to be such as would not, on any other account, be called in question. Yet we have more to rely upon in the case before us;—we are enabled to meet the most extravagant demand. For not only are the writings, to which I have referred in the preceding pages, referred to

in their turn by succeeding authors, there is such a continued and uninterrupted succession of similar reference, down to the present day, as must put an end to the supposition of forgery in every mind that does not repudiate altogether the evidence arising from human testimony. It is true, that I have not traced and exhibited in detail this unbroken series of reference ;—the labour of the task could be surpassed only by its inutility ; for, supposing that the requisite volumes were written, who would be found to read them ? But, if it be understood that there is a chasm in the regular succession of such reference—any such chasm as would admit of a supposition that the earlier writings might be forgeries—only let the adversaries of the Christian cause point out the period in question, that it may be in the power of its friends to correct their mistake.

In the meanwhile,—assuming, as a position not to be denied, that the Gospel history was written and published during the Apostolic age,—let us consider how this circumstance tends to establish its truth ?

The great body of the Jewish nation, by whom the divine mission of Christ had been rejected, and the rulers of the Jews, in particular, had a

deep interest in exposing any falsehood in the Gospel narrative which could be detected. No people were ever more distinguished, than the Jews, by *national* feelings ; their national expectations, in particular, were unbounded. But, without founding on this peculiarity of their character, was it possible that the rulers of any country, placed in their circumstances, should have allowed such a narrative as that of the Gospel to remain uncontradicted, if they had known it to be false, and had been able to disprove it ?

One who represented himself as a messenger of God, had condemned in the strongest terms both the principles and conduct of the Jewish rulers. In opposition to their fondest hopes of national aggrandizement, he had declared that the Messiah's kingdom was not to be of this world. His whole doctrine was calculated to subvert their influence and authority over the consciences of a people who had blindly submitted to them. The rulers, in consequence, seek to put him to death ; and he charges them with that design. They at length accomplish their purpose against him, but not till he has foretold the punishment which awaited them, in the utter destruction of their people and nation, and has also pledged himself to prove the truth of his whole testimony, by rising

from the state of the dead. Means are employed to prevent any false report of a resurrection ; yet his disciples bear witness to his having risen, as he said, and having afterwards ascended to heaven. All these things, and many more of a similar kind, whether true or false, were set forth in the Gospel narrative ; that narrative was published by four of the followers of Christ, and was read by men of every rank and condition. If it were false, the Jewish rulers had it in their power to detect and expose its falsehood ; for the greater part of the transactions recorded had been open to public observation, and were of such recent date as admitted of their being proved or disproved by eye and ear-witnesses.

Yet no attempt seems to have been made by men so deeply concerned, to confute the Gospel history.

I admit that their rejection of Christ as a Saviour, may be held to be a denial of his miracles, as the effect of divine and preternatural agency. But I am not, at present, contending for the reality of the miracles. I only desire at present to establish the truth of those facts and circumstances, not miraculous, which may afterwards enable us to judge of the miracles. The Jewish rulers must have been aware that, if the ordinary

facts of the Gospel history could be disproved, those which were preternatural would lose their title to credit—would lose the very foundation on which alone their truth could be maintained. Could it have been proved that Jesus was in Galilee at the time when he is said to have wrought a miracle in Judea, or that the alleged witnesses of any miracle in question could not be present, because known to be elsewhere employed,—could it have been proved that any one of the persons, said to have been miraculously cured, had never laboured under the disease or infirmity alleged, or that he was afterwards known to be afflicted in the same way as he had been before the pretended miracle,—in any one of these cases there would certainly have been a detection of imposture. Could it even have been proved that the most trivial facts of the Gospel history were misrepresented, it would have brought the historian into discredit ; his testimony to other facts would not have been respected. The enemies of Christ had, therefore, the strongest motive to institute a strict investigation of all such facts and circumstances as those to which I have referred.

Yet we do not find that the Jewish rulers pretended to disprove or even to deny any thing of a kind not preternatural, which has been recorded by one or other of the four Evangelists. Had

there been a confutation of the Gospel history, it is impossible to suppose that it would not have been made public ; for, otherwise, it must have been useless. It is natural to suppose that it would have been circulated wherever the apostles of Christ were endeavouring to convince the world of his divine mission.—One of the avowed objects of his religion was to supersede every other which had prevailed among men. Its design in this respect was soon perceived, and had the effect of uniting the rulers of every nation in a virtual league against it. Is it possible to suppose that, in these circumstances, a confutation of the narrative, on which the truth of this religion was founded, and a confutation proceeding from the country which was the scene of the transactions in question, would not have been greedily received, and even sought after ? Or is it possible that such a confutation (if it had existed) should, after all, have been utterly lost, so as to be unknown to succeeding ages, while contemporary writings of every other kind have been handed down to the present generation ?

Perhaps it may be argued that, when the great body of men in the civilized world were converted to the Christian faith, special care would be taken by a tyrannical priesthood to destroy any such confutation of the Gospel history. But it must

not be forgotten that, before the world could be thus Christianized, the truth of the Gospel narrative must have been well established. Either no attempt must have been made to confute it, or the attempt must have proved ineffectual. Yet that there had been no attempt to confute it—of a kind entitled to notice—is manifest from another circumstance. For, though many arguments and invectives against the Christian faith (which are still extant) were early published by heathen philosophers; and, though many edicts also, for the persecution of Christians, were issued by the Roman emperors, we find no allusion in such writings to an understood or alleged falsehood in the Gospel history, or to any confutation of its truth on the part of the Jewish rulers.

The conclusion to be derived from this view of the case, seems to me irresistible; as a narrative of facts not preternatural, the Gospel history must be true. The evidence on which the conclusion rests is no doubt of a negative kind; but it so little admits of deception, that I think it should afford more perfect satisfaction to the human mind, than is ordinarily derived from the most direct and positive testimony.

It has been observed with truth, that even can-

did minds demand more evidence for the Gospel history than for any other record of facts. How is this demand to be accounted for? A recent author has ascribed it to the sacred nature of the subject; and he may be in some measure right. But I think it may be ascribed, more particularly, to the circumstance, that the Gospel history, regarded as a whole, calls for our belief in many things which are miraculous. Considered in this view, the demand for stronger evidence seems to be reasonable. How, then, does this affect my present argument? I might perhaps urge, that as my immediate object is to prove the truth of the Gospel narrative only so far as its facts are not miraculous, less evidence ought to serve the purpose. Yet I am not willing to take this ground. For, on the foundation of what I am now endeavouring to prove, I expect afterwards to establish the reality of the miracles. There may, in this view, be good reason for exercising nearly the same caution in yielding assent to what I now maintain, as in admitting the truth of the miracles themselves. But, considering the case of the Jewish rulers, as I have now explained it, with reference to the truth of the evangelical record, Had not they a corresponding advantage against its authors, which affords to us additional security against deception? They knew that the belief

or rejection of Christ's miracles would depend on their accompanying circumstances, and the evidence arising out of these circumstances. They had it in their power so to compare and weigh the various facts and circumstances which were to constitute the ground of evidence, as to ascertain exactly the particulars which they were most concerned to disprove, at a time when they had also the means of disproving whatever was false. While they continued to deny the reality of the miracles, they had it in their power to take their ground, and bring forward their evidence, against all or any of these accompanying facts, in the way best calculated to give them every advantage ; and they must have been blind if they did not more or less foresee what was likely to be the consequence of their neglecting this opportunity. Their total silence must therefore be held as evidence of accumulated force, for proving that the Gospel history, in respect of circumstances not preternatural, was found to be unassailable. All the caution which was requisite in admitting facts, which were afterwards to be employed as proofs of miraculous agency, could only have been an additional reason for a strict investigation of their truth ; and all the caution which men may still be called to exercise, in admitting the same facts,

cannot outweigh that additional evidence which results from the peculiar circumstances in which the Jewish rulers were thus placed, and their utter silence in these circumstances.

SECTION III.

THE GOSPEL HISTORY WAS SUBSEQUENTLY AND INCIDENTALLY CORROBORATED, IN MANY IMPORTANT POINTS, BY SOME AUTHORS ADVERSE TO THE RELIGION OF CHRIST;—AND, NOTWITHSTANDING THE RAPID PROGRESS OF HIS RELIGION, THERE WAS STILL NO ATTEMPT MADE, IN ANY QUARTER, TO DISPROVE ANY PART OF WHAT IS CONTAINED IN THE EVANGELICAL RECORD.

It must not be supposed, from what has been stated in the preceding Section, that the learned of the Jewish nation remained long inattentive to the progress of Christianity, or did not, in their own way, make attempts to counteract it. I have already adverted to a formal disputation which *Trypho*, a learned Jew, maintained with *Justin Martyr* respecting the Christian faith. But from the account of this debate, recorded and published by Justin, it does not appear that Trypho called in question any of those facts which the rulers of his country had originally allowed to pass uncontradicted;—his argument was chiefly directed against the doctrine of the Gospel as in its nature incredible;—the facts of the Gospel history, instead of being denied, appear to have been so far

admitted by him as to have been made the foundation of the argument on both sides.

On the part of heathen writers also, we have the same *tacit* admission of the Gospel narrative, as a record of facts not preternatural;—and I hold this to be a circumstance of considerable importance; for though men, in the course of debate, may have tacitly admitted, as a ground of argument, what they did not mean ultimately to concede,—the importance attached to the facts in question does, at the least, make it highly improbable that they should have remained uncontradicted from the beginning, if it had been thought possible to disprove them.

But, before I proceed a step farther, I desire fairly to acknowledge, in reference to Trypho, and more especially in reference to some heathen adversaries of the Christian faith, that we are in possession of their language, only as quoted by others. The original writings of *Celsus*, in particular, are now lost; all our knowledge of what they contained is derived from the answer to them which was published by *Origen*. But the minute accuracy with which *Origen* refers to the arguments of his antagonist, may be judged of from one of his introductory remarks: “That we may not seem,” says he, “designedly to pass over any of

his (Celsus') arguments, as having no answer to make, we have determined to confute every one of his objections according to our ability, observing not the natural connexion of things, but the order in which he has wrote them in his book."* The fidelity also of Origen may be estimated by the fact, that all his quotations from other authors, whose writings have not been lost, are found to agree exactly with what we still read in the books to which he refers.

I therefore venture to bring forward the language of Celsus, even under the disadvantage of quoting it as recorded by another. Celsus admits, "that Jesus had founded the Christian Institution, and that he was reckoned by the Christians the Son of God."† He refers to the flight of the infant Saviour into Egypt: "What need was there," says he, speaking in the name of a Jew, "what need was there for carrying thee, while an infant, into Egypt, that thou mightest not be slain? For it did not become God to be afraid of death."‡ He alludes to what passed in the Temple, when Jesus was required to give a sign as an evidence of his divine mission. He makes ex-

* Answer, p. 31.

† Book i. p. 21.

‡ Book i. p. 51.

plicit reference to the circumstances of Christ's sufferings as an objection to his high pretensions, and asks why he did not "deliver himself from this ignominy, and treat those as they deserved who behaved ignominiously both towards himself and his Father." *

Admitting that Celsus is not to be held as bearing testimony to the truth of the circumstances to which he thus alludes, he at least brings them into view without contradicting them; he makes no reference to any different account of the life of Christ as more to be relied on than that of the Evangelists; he does not even insinuate that the account given by them had been called in question. He obviously refers to the Gospel narrative as the only document on which he had it in his power to reason, respecting the truth or falsehood of the Christian faith. He virtually admits that he could not write on the subject, without presuming on the authenticity of that document. He, no doubt, derives from the historical facts conclusions very opposite to what the authors of the Evangelical history had intended. But, at this stage of the argument, I have nothing to do with his conclusions; I shall hereafter examine those historical facts, which were partly brought under

* Book ii. p. 81.

the review of Celsus ; and I shall, at least, have the benefit of his authority for reasoning upon them as if they were true.

With this view, I do not think it unimportant to add, that Celsus even refers to circumstances in the Gospel narrative, of the very kind to which I shall afterwards have occasion to advert for proving the reality of Christ's miracles. " Moreover they tell us," says Celsus, speaking in the name of a Jew, " that an angel came to the sepulchre, some say one, others two, who told the women that he was risen. For the Son of God seems not to have been able to open the sepulchre, but there was need of another who should remove the stone." *

It is of no consequence that Celsus, in this passage, calls in question or denies a part of that evidence by which the miracle of the resurrection is established. The competency of that evidence remains for future consideration. In the meanwhile, Celsus tacitly admits, that the rejection of the miracle must depend on an examination of the alleged circumstances attending it, along with the testimony by which these circumstances are either verified or falsified. He so far proceeds in the very way which was most natural for disproving, had it been possible, all the miracles of Christ ;

* Book v. p. 266.

and consequently leads us to repeat the question, Why the Jewish rulers, who certainly had it in their power to follow out such an examination with every possible advantage, and had every motive to stimulate them in doing so, shrunk from all attempt to disprove the circumstances on which the evidence of the miracles depends?

I shall not stay to extract similar evidence from the writings of others—even of Porphyry, the Tyrian sage, or the Emperor Julian—because I should still labour under the inconvenience of quoting from books which are lost, and upon the authority of extracts which had been made from them. I rather hasten to unencumbered ground; and shall now have the satisfaction of referring my readers to attestations of the truth of the Gospel history, which he cannot fail to respect—the testimony of authors whose works are duly preserved to us, as the ornaments of the age in which they lived—a testimony extending, indeed, only to those facts to which the respective authors had natural occasion to advert; but direct and unequivocal in its reference to these, and such as renders unassailable that convincing though negative evidence, which results from the silence of the Jewish rulers.

The authors, to whom I am about to refer, were not engaged in controversy against the Christian faith. We can, therefore, look to them for no more than general references to the facts of the Gospel narrative. But when I mention the names of *Suetonius* and *Tacitus*, I need scarcely add, that theirs is not the testimony of Christians—a circumstance to which I attach more importance than some friends of the Christian cause allow to it.

I not only admit, but maintain, that the credibility of the Evangelists themselves is better supported than that of any other historian to whom I can refer. Yet there is one qualification which it is impossible that Christian writers could possess—that of having no leaning to the side of Christianity, in the great question respecting its truth or its falsehood. No doubt, some of the early Christian writers had been, before their conversion, strongly prepossessed against the Christian doctrine; their conversion was, therefore, a striking example of the triumph of truth over prejudice; and the testimony of such men derives, from this consideration, much additional claim to respect and confidence. But the authors, whom I am about to quote, not only *had been* unbelievers in the Christian doctrine, but *continued to be so* at the time when they gave their testimony; a

circumstance which seems to me to enter very deeply into the question of the credibility of that testimony, so far as it is favourable to the Christian cause. It is possible to suppose that those prejudices, which Christian writers, before their conversion, had entertained against the doctrine of the Gospel, may have given place to more than a just respect for it, even to what may be called prejudice in its favour. But, if such men as Suetonius or Tacitus were influenced in their testimony by a bias or leaning of any sort, it was morally impossible that it should be a bias to the side of the Christian faith. The testimony of an enemy in our behalf is *proverbially* entitled to confidence; but it must be the testimony of one who not only has been, but continues to be, our enemy.

Had either Suetonius or Tacitus admitted the resurrection of Christ, or borne testimony in any way to the truth of his miracles, it would have materially altered their *status* as witnesses.—If, admitting his miracles, they had also acknowledged his divine mission, or, in other words, had become Christians—though their personal credit would have been strengthened rather than weakened—their testimony to the truth of the Gospel history would have wanted that peculiar advantage on account of which I have expressed my de-

sire to resort to it. If, on the contrary, they had admitted the reality of Christ's miracles, without acknowledging his divine mission, they would have manifested such a perverted understanding—an understanding influenced by such a perverse heart—as would have much diminished their claim to confidence. But their testimony has no reference to the miracles ; it refers entirely to circumstances not preternatural, and is, in this respect, happily accommodated to what I have proposed as my exclusive object in this part of the general argument.

With a view to some of the theories on which the truth of the Gospel has been questioned, it is material that we have the testimony of these authors to the existence of Christ as a teacher of religion, at the period to which the New Testament refers, and to the influence which he had over those of the Jews who had been induced to believe in him. Suetonius informs us, that the Emperor *Claudius* “ banished the Jews from Rome, because they made continual tumults at the instigation of Christ.”* I have nothing to do, at present, with the charge of a tumultuous disposition which is here brought against those Jews who had been

* Claud. chap. xxv.

converted to Christianity. It is enough that Suetonius bears testimony to the existence of a body of Jewish Christians, whom Claudius—either with or without cause—thought proper to banish; and it is worthy of remark, that his testimony to this fact is in exact conformity to that of the author of *The Acts of the Apostles*, who informs us that *Aquila* and *Priscilla* (two Jewish Christians) were, at this time, banished from Rome by an edict of the Emperor Claudius.* Suetonius farther informs us that, in the reign of *Nero*, the Christians at Rome “were punished with death—a sort of people,” adds he, “addicted to a new and mischievous superstition.”†

We have here evidence that, in the city of Rome, the followers of Christ had already become so numerous, and a body so important in the view of the imperial government, as to be persecuted on account of their religion; but upon this point (which will be found material) we shall get more light from the writings of *Tacitus*.

Tacitus was naturally led to speak of Christ and his followers, when he gave an account of the burning of Rome in the reign of *Nero*. He tells us, that the people accused *Nero* himself of having

* Acts, chap. xviii. ver. 2.

† Ner. chap. xvi.

set fire to the city, but that Nero imputed it to the Christians,—and that, in order to quash the report against himself, he “punished them with the most exquisite sufferings. The author of that sect,” adds he, “was Christ, who, in the reign of Tiberius, was punished with death by the procurator Pontius Pilate. But the pestilent superstition, which, for the present, was suppressed, broke out afresh, not only in Judea, where the evil first began, but in the city. . . . First, then, those who confessed were apprehended; next, by their information, a vast multitude who were convicted, not so much of the burning, as of the hatred of mankind. These were made a sport of in their death, being covered with the skins of wild beasts, that they might be torn to pieces of dogs, or nailed to crosses, or covered with inflammable matter, and when the daylight failed, they were burnt to give light.” *

We have thus the testimony of an Heathen historian, (whose title to credit has not hitherto been questioned,) for a variety of facts, which are of no small importance. He bears evidence, 1st, That Jesus Christ had lived and died at the time to which the Evangelists refer; 2d, That he was put

* Annal. xv.

to death by Pontius Pilate ; 3d, That he taught a new religion ; 4th, That these things happened in the land of Judea ; and, 5th, That, within a short time after his death, his religion was professed by many, not only in Judea, but in the capital of the Roman empire.

We have, at the same time, the testimony of the younger Pliny, (in his celebrated letter to the Emperor Trajan,) for a more particular and very important fact, viz. that the early Christians acknowledged and worshipped Christ as God—that they “ were wont, on an appointed day, to meet before it was light, and to sing with one another, an hymn to Christ as God.”*

If these testimonies be not rejected, there must, in the first place, be an end to the vague pretence to which some minds are apt to resort, that the Christian religion, in its origin, may have been nothing more than an invention of priestcraft, during a dark age, when mankind at large had not as much knowledge or learning as qualified them to detect imposture. It must be held as beyond question, that the Gospel was, on the contrary, taught and promulgated by its authors, at the very time to which Christians assign its origin, and at

* Pliny's Letters, book x. Letter 97.

an era when men had made such unexampled advances in wisdom and knowledge, as eminently qualified them either to ascertain its truth, or make its falsehood manifest.

The particular facts, too, on which the evidence now before us more particularly bears, are not only important, but as numerous as we could naturally expect to find in the writings of such men as the authors in question; and the exact conformity of their testimony to that of the Evangelists, relative to the same points, certainly gives the latter an additional claim to our credit, for the truth of other circumstances, which fill up their narrative.

We have before us, indeed, the testimony of both Suetonius and Tacitus to one fact which the Evangelists had it not in their power to record, but which is of no small importance to our present argument;—we have the unequivocal testimony of these Roman authors that, within a short period after the death of Christ, the number of Christians, even in Rome, the capital of the civilized world, had become so great, as makes it impossible to suppose that their sacred books, if they had contained any falsehood, would not have been rigidly scrutinized and effectually refuted.

We have seen that, in the reign of Nero, only about thirty years after the death of Christ, the Christians amounted to what Tacitus denominates "a vast multitude." Pliny, indeed, in his letter to Trajan, (already quoted,) expresses an opinion that, in the province of which he was governor, their number was somewhat diminished, and that the contagion, as he calls it, might still be "stopped and corrected." I need not say that, in this expectation, he was disappointed; but it is more important to observe, that the words in which he expressed his opinion, bear a very extraordinary testimony to the prevalence of the Christian faith, some time before the date of his letter;—"At least," says he, "it is very certain that the almost desolate temples are begun to be frequented, and the sacred rites, long neglected, to be renewed." We have here the admission of a Roman pro-consul, that the religion of Christ had, at a very early period, so prevailed, as almost to put an end to the rites of Heathen and idolatrous worship.

We have also ground to believe that, among the early Christians at Rome, there were some individuals of the highest rank in society. For we learn from another Roman author, *Dion Cassius*, that, during the persecution under Domitian, about fifty-five years after Christ's death, two of the victims were men of consular dignity, and that one

of them, *Flavius*, though a near relation of the emperor, was put to death during the time of his consulship.

Is it supposable that, in such circumstances, the wise and learned among those who struggled to suppress the Christian faith, never bethought themselves of accomplishing their object by a detection of falsehood in the Christian record? We know that they made no such attempt; but is it supposable that the attempt would not have been made, if it could have been done with success?

We have sufficiently considered the argument for the truth of the Gospel history arising from the fact, that though it was published while eye and ear-witnesses were alive to contradict whatever might be false, no refutation of it was attempted by the *Jewish* rulers. But far stronger, in some respects, is the case now before us. We find that the publication of the Gospel history, and the corresponding labour of the Apostles of Christ, had well-nigh subverted the religion, not of Judea alone, but of the Roman empire; and it was not without the strongest reason that its rulers had taken alarm; for the claims which the Gospel put forward, corresponded to its unexampled progress. It distinguished itself (as I have formerly hinted)

from every other system of doctrine and worship, by claiming *universal* acceptance. The Roman government had, in consequence, declared war against it; and their eagerness to suppress it is manifest from their having employed such means of violence and cruelty, as they had never resorted to for any other purpose. Judea, the cradle of the new faith, was at the same time a Roman province. The author of Christianity had lived and died under the immediate eye and observation of Roman magistrates. In their hearing he had avouched his Divine mission; and, under the authority of a Roman governor, he had been put to death. His followers maintained that he had wrought miracles, and appealed to them as the ground of their faith. They referred to facts and circumstances of the most public nature as evidence of the truth of these miracles. Many individuals were still alive, by whose testimony the reality of these facts and circumstances could be either ascertained or refuted. To their testimony the Roman government could easily refer. They were also sure of commanding the most willing and zealous aid, from the local and subordinate rulers of Judea, in any measure against the Christian faith.—Was there ever an instance, from the beginning of the world until now, of such an opportunity being given for the detection and expo-

sure of falsehood, in circumstances of such importance, and of its being notwithstanding neglected or disregarded, by men who could hope to accomplish their purpose?—The governors of the Roman empire were themselves sensible—Pliny, in his letter already quoted, has borne testimony to the fact—that persecution was beginning to defeat its own object ; but any detection of falsehood in that record on which Christian faith was established, would have operated a very different effect. Men like *Flavius*, the Roman consul, would not have resisted such direct evidence of imposture, and have laid down their lives for maintaining the imposture. Could the Roman government have found evidence against the Gospel history sufficient for bringing into discredit any of its facts and circumstances which are not preternatural, but were manifest to the outward eye, they would have had little to dread from the religion of Christ ;—its prevalence would have been short-lived. But, considering the case in all the views which have been presented,—with reference to both the Roman governors and the Jewish rulers, the incontrovertible fact that no attempt was ever made to detect and expose any falsehood in the narrative of the Evangelists,—affords such evidence of its truth as cannot be adduced in support of any other historical record on earth.

SECTION IV.

THE GOSPEL HISTORY HAS BEEN TRANSMITTED TO MEN OF THE PRESENT DAY IN A WAY WHICH LEAVES US NO CAUSE TO APPREHEND THAT IT HAS BEEN SURREPTITIOUSLY ALTERED OR CORRUPTED.

1. THERE is reason to believe that the original manuscripts of the Gospel history were long preserved as a standard by which the purity and correctness of every transcript might be effectually tried and ascertained. They were also translated, at an early period, into various languages; and numerous copies of both the originals and the translations were dispersed over all the civilized world. While these were multiplied in succeeding ages, a number of the early transcripts were faithfully deposited in those libraries which afforded the best assurance of their safe custody. Some of them are accordingly preserved; and we have the satisfaction of finding an entire agreement between these early transcripts and those copies of the Gospel history which are now in the hands of the Christian world at large.

It is upon evidence of this sort that we chiefly rely for the purity of other historical documents which have been handed down to us from early ages; but the kind of evidence, to which I now refer, is more perfect in the case of the Gospel history than in any other, just in proportion to the greater number of translations and manuscripts of the sacred volume, bearing a corresponding variety of dates, which it has been in the power of men from the beginning—and which it is still in the power of those who are inclined to it—so to examine and collate, as to ascertain their conformity to one another.

2. We have seen that many facts of the Gospel history were referred to, and even much of its language quoted, by some authors who were nearly contemporary with the Evangelists, and by others also in succeeding ages. Of such references and quotations, those which I have selected in the two preceding Sections are only a specimen. The number to which the attention of the reader might be directed, and which are brought forward in detail by Dr Lardner, is so great, that from them alone, independent of the New Testament itself, it has been justly said that it would not be difficult to form an abridged but connected history of the life of Christ. Yet there is not a single in-

stance in which these references and quotations do not tend to establish the pure and unadulterated character of the Gospel history, as we now read it in the sacred volume ;—there is not a single instance in which the writings of the Evangelists, as we have them in our hands, do not correspond with the quotations which have been made from them in the earliest ages. Every mind, I think, must admit that this evidence of faithful transmission far surpasses the corresponding evidence that is applicable to any other documents.

3. Yet there is a circumstance in the case of the Gospel history which affords a pledge of faithful transmission still more peculiar ; for there is no other record on earth that has been so much, or nearly so much, as that in question, the subject of controversial discussion, and of that minute, jealous attention which controversial discussion excites. Any alteration of its language and import was, in such circumstances, impossible to be made, without being proclaimed, by the enemies of Christianity, as a proof of knavery and imposture in its friends.

Besides the controversy between Christians and unbelievers,—The contending sects which, from the beginning, divided Christians themselves,—the incessant appeals of each to the language of the

Scripture record in support of their distinguishing tenets,—and the jealousy with which one party would certainly have contemplated any alteration of it that could have been attempted by another,—have afforded much additional security for its safe preservation. Even in those dark ages, when there was less dispute about articles of faith, it is manifest that the Romish priesthood must have seen it to be impossible to impose on the world any alteration of the Scriptures; for we should not, otherwise, have found in them, at this day, such strong and explicit language, foretelling and condemning the very corruptions which these men superinduced on the Christian doctrine and worship: No such language would have been allowed to remain, if all the cunning of the Romish priesthood could have accomplished, without detection, an alteration of the Scripture record.

That evidence for the faithful transmission of the Gospel history, which results from these views of the case combined, seems to me to be stronger than what any mind, at the date of its first publication, could have anticipated or imagined. It would be difficult, I think, even now, to imagine any way in which the evidence in question could have been rendered more perfect. I do not, therefore, hesitate to say, that the man who rejects it as in-

sufficient, and yet gives credit to the faithful transmission of any other historical document, is guilty of more palpable inconsistency than has been ordinarily exemplified in reference to any of the concerns of this world.

Upon the ground thus stated, in connexion with all the preceding argument of the Chapter, which I now bring to an end, I trust that every candid reader will admit the truth of my original proposition—*That the Gospel history is supported by evidence which well entitles us to confide in it as a narrative of facts, so far as they are not miraculous.*

CHAPTER III.

CONSIDERING THE GOSPEL HISTORY AS AN AUTHENTIC RECORD OF FACTS NOT MIRACULOUS, WE HAVE SUFFICIENT PROOF OF THE REALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN MIRACLES, AND CONSEQUENTLY PROOF OF CHRIST'S DIVINE MISSION.

IT will be conducive to a lucid arrangement, that the sufficiency of miracles to prove a Divine Mission be considered in the first place. It shall therefore be the subject of the first Section.

SECTION I.

THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST, IF PROVED TO BE REAL, MAY BE REASONABLY SUSTAINED AS EVIDENCE OF HIS DIVINE MISSION.

IT seems impossible to resist the evidence arising from miracles, as stated, in a very few words, by Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. "No man," said he to Christ, "can do these miracles that

thou doest, except God be with him.”* The very essence of a miracle consists in its being a work out of the ordinary course of Nature, and therefore accomplished by preternatural agency. Now Christ laid claim to a power, either inherent or derived, of performing such works, for the express purpose of proving to the world that he was sent of God. If it shall appear that, in these circumstances, he actually did what he pledged himself to do, what shall we conclude concerning him? We believe that there is a God who made the world, because nothing but his infinite power could create or produce those objects which we behold around us;—What, then, shall we conclude concerning Christ, if it shall appear that the elements of this visible world obeyed his command, and that he had power alike to create as to destroy—alike to restore life as to take it away? Shall it be supposed that such power was communicated to him by God for the purpose of deceiving the world? Is it possible to entertain such a supposition with reference to a Being who cannot lie,—whose truth is inviolable, while his goodness also is unbounded? Or is there any other way in which the conclusion, which I would derive from miracles, if proved to be real, can be either resisted or evaded?

* John, chap. iii. ver. 2.

I am not forgetting that the very Scriptures, for the truth of which I contend, make mention of miracles (real or fictitious) which appear to have been wrought by the power of evil spirits, and wrought for the purpose of deceiving the world. I have no wish even to question the reality of these miracles. There is nothing, I think, in the language of Scripture respecting them, which entitles me to deny that they were real. They who believe in the Christian revelation, cannot entertain a doubt that there are evil spirits possessed of power superior to that with which men are endowed; nor have we any means of ascertaining exactly the limits of their power. But, as certainly as they are creatures of God, all their power is derived from him, and all the use which they make of it is under his control. He may permit them to exercise much power as an instrument in his own hand, for trying the spirit that is in man. But it is inconsistent with every just idea of either the truth or the goodness of the Divine Being, to suppose that he permits evil spirits to exercise their power in a way which ultimately deceives the well-disposed and upright in heart. Though the magicians of Egypt performed miracles by the invocation and aid of evil spirits, all that could be pernicious in the influence of these miracles on men of upright hearts, was counter-

acted by miracles on the part of Moses and Aaron, which were so much greater than the other, as to compel the magicians themselves to acknowledge, in the latter, the finger and the power of God.

We are, besides, furnished by Christ with a criterion—obviously fair—by which a well-regulated and discriminating mind is enabled at once to distinguish those miracles, which are the seal of a divine commission, from any miracle that is wrought by the power of an evil spirit. “There was brought unto Christ one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb, and he healed him, inso-much, that the blind and dumb spake and saw; and all the people were amazed, and said—Is not this the Son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said—This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the Prince of the Devils;” to which Jesus replied—“If Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself.”* The argument is irresistible, and is, in its substance, applicable to every case in which it is necessary to distinguish between a miracle which proceeds from God, and one which is the work of an evil spirit. It is impossible that an evil spirit should be, of his own accord, in any way aiding to a miracle for advancing the cause of righteousness, or for

* Matth. chap. xii. ver. 22—26.

establishing the authority of one who preaches to the world the doctrine of righteousness. If a teacher, therefore, appear to be invested with the power of working miracles, his doctrine is an infallible criterion of the source from which his power is derived ; and, after the review which we have taken, in a former part of this treatise, of the nature and tendency of the doctrine of Christ, it cannot, I apprehend, be necessary to say more for the purpose of proving that, if he shall appear to have wrought miracles for establishing his authority as a teacher, they must have been wrought by the power of God.

SECTION II.

THE REALITY OF MIRACLES MAY BE SATISFACTORILY PROVED BY
HUMAN TESTIMONY.

THE reverse of this proposition has been maintained by a celebrated philosopher (Mr Hume); and if his argument were well founded, it would be vain for me to appeal to human testimony in support of the miracles of Christ. No accumulation of testimony—however trust-worthy the witnesses might seem—could in this case be of any avail. Mr Hume's argument, therefore, (so far as it calls for reply in this treatise,) must be met as a preliminary objection.

Mr Hume maintains that our confidence in human testimony arises entirely from our experience of its veracity; and that, "as the evidence derived from witnesses and human testimony is founded on past experience, so it varies with that experience." He, at the same time, maintains that, as "a miracle is a violation" (*suspension* more properly) "of the laws of nature, and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these

laws, the proof against a miracle, from the nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined ; - - - consequently, that there is proof against proof, of which the strongest must prevail," - - - and that, " we have nothing to do but subtract the one from the other, and embrace an opinion either on the one side or the other, with that assurance which arises from the remainder. But this subtraction," adds he, " with regard to all popular religions, amounts to an entire annihilation, and therefore we may establish it as a maxim that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion."*

This argument has been so ably and successfully refuted by the advocates of the Christian cause, and particularly by Dr Campbell of Aberdeen, that an attempt to say much on the subject, that can be worthy of attention, and has not been, in its substance, advanced by others, would be, on my part, labour equally arduous and uncalled for. My remarks shall therefore be few ; yet I trust that they will prove sufficient to satisfy any candid mind.

* Hume's Essays, edit. 1809, sect. x.

In reference to the first of Mr Hume's premises, viz. That our confidence in human testimony is derived entirely from our experience of its veracity,—Dr Campbell has well shewn that a proposition, very nearly *opposite*, might be maintained more consistently with truth. “The earliest assent,” says he, “which is given to testimony by children, and which is previous to all experience, is in fact the most unlimited; and, by a gradual experience of mankind, it is gradually contracted, and reduced to narrower bounds. To say, therefore, that our *diffidence* in testimony is the result of experience, is more philosophical, because more consonant to truth, than to say that our faith in testimony has this foundation. Accordingly youth, which is unexperienced, is credulous; age, on the contrary, is distrustful. Exactly the reverse would be the case, were this author's (Mr Hume's) doctrine just.”*

Not less certain is it that the last of Mr Hume's premises, viz. that we have experience of the laws of Nature being unalterable—contains a *fallacy*, and one of which he avails himself in the course of his argument. He argues on the supposition that the existence of a miracle is *contrary* to our experience, which is tantamount to maintaining

* Campbell on Miracles, pp. 14, 15.

that we have experience that a miracle cannot be. But all that can be maintained consistently with truth is that, in reference to miracles, there is, on our part, an absence or want of experience,—that all our knowledge of miracles is derived from testimony, not from personal observation. Now, were this a sufficient reason (says Dr Macknight) against believing in the reality of any miracle, the inhabitants of the tropical regions might, with equal reason, refuse to believe in the existence of some of the *ordinary* phenomena of nature which, though familiar to our observation, have never been presented to their bodily senses. Yet we do not find that, on these points, their minds have proved inaccessible to the evidence of testimony.

Mr Hume, indeed, appears to have been secretly conscious of the insufficiency of his own argument; for after maintaining it, at first, in the broadest terms, he at length desires that it shall not be understood as extending farther than that a miracle can never be proved, so as to be the foundation of a system of religion. “I own,” adds he, “that otherwise there may possibly be miracles, of such a kind as to admit of proof from human testimony.”* Why a miracle that is in-

* P. 134.

tended to be the foundation of a system of religion may not be proved as effectually as any other, Mr Hume has not condescended to state. He seems to have expected that his readers would concur with him,—at once, and without any argument,—in recognising such a purpose or intention as palpably absurd. I shall not, however, stay to inquire whether the establishment of a system of religion be not the most reasonable and important of all purposes ; for the contempt, with which Mr Hume appears to have regarded it, leads me at once to the ground on which I think myself absolved from all obligation to enter into a more particular and detailed examination of his argument. It is, strictly speaking, an atheistical argument ; for it will be found, that the admission that there is a God, removes, at once, even the illusory basis on which it might otherwise rest, and ought therefore to divest it of all influence on the minds of those who believe in God,—the class of men to whom alone I address myself.

Were there no God—the Creator of all things—on whom all things depend, we might be led to conclude that the laws of nature are eternal ; and there might also arise a presumption of their being unchangeable, since we could not recognise any power by which an alteration or change could be

effected. But, admitting that there is a Being who created all things, and who, in disposing of the works of his hand, must have established the laws of nature, it is altogether impossible to deny that their operation *may* be suspended by the same power which established them ;—even the likelihood or the improbability of such an event must depend entirely on the importance of the end proposed. The goodness of God to his intellectual and moral offspring is manifest in his works ; and I have already had occasion to shew that it was impossible for men to conceive of Him as a Being infinitely good, without finding some ground to hope that he would be pleased to communicate to them a knowledge of his counsel and will, beyond what it was in their power to derive from the exercise of their own reason or understanding in its present degenerate state. It was, therefore, proportionally natural and reasonable to suppose that he might be pleased to bear witness to a messenger who should speak in his name, by such preternatural agency accompanying his words, or such a manifest suspension of the laws of nature, as should leave no reasonable doubt of a Divine mission.

It will not be supposed that the Being who made us has left himself without the means of imparting to any messenger such credentials as should entitle him to our confidence. Nor has any

other way been pointed out by which the reality of a Divine mission could be so well established as by an interposition of Divine power obviously preternatural.

While these views forbid us to regard a miracle as a thing so utterly improbable that no testimony ought to convince us of its reality, a just consideration of the work of Creation ought also to prevent that obstruction to our belief in miracles, which might otherwise arise from our having no knowledge of things so wonderful ; for the work of creation, which we daily contemplate and acknowledge as the work of God, is certainly more wonderful than all the miracles in which we are called to believe.

I do not indeed say that Mr Hume's definition of a miracle is applicable to the work of creation ; for there could be neither violation nor suspension of the laws of nature at a period when these laws did not exist. But the great reason why Mr Hume would have us to regard a miracle as incapable of proof is, that we have no experience of any thing similar to it. I therefore ask, whether we have more experience of creating power, and whether its exercise is to be regarded as less wonderful ? The act of restoring to life one who was dead, seems to be the greatest miracle in which we are

called to believe, yet it will not be pretended that the exercise of power, which it implies, is greater or more wonderful than that by which the same man was at first created out of nothing.

For giving effect, however, to his sophistical reasoning, Mr Hume has endeavoured to perplex the minds of his readers, respecting the evidence of miracles as practically exemplified. He has referred them to miracles alleged to have been wrought, both in the Heathen world, and by members of the Church of Rome ; and has magnified—for whatever purpose—the evidence by which these alleged miracles are attested. But how does this evidence affect our present argument ?

The transactions, to which Mr Hume refers, either were, or were not, miraculous.—If they were, To what consequences does it lead, or what conclusion are we to derive from it ?

The only Pagan miracle to which Mr Hume refers, in the revised edition of his works, is what Tacitus reports of the Emperor Vespasian curing a blind man and a lame one. Now, for what purpose is this miracle said to have been wrought ? The only purpose (so far as we may conjecture from the historical account) was to establish more effectually the authority of the Emperor, by making men

believe that it had the sanction of Heaven. Supposing, then, (if we possibly could,) that Vespasian was enabled for this purpose to work a miracle,—How does this supposition invalidate the miracles of Christ? or in what way should it weaken our confidence in the evidence by which they are attested?

The same question is applicable to Mr Hume's Popish miracles. For what purpose are they said to have been wrought? Perhaps for imparting the sanction of Heaven to one sect or party of the Roman Church in opposition to another. But let it be conceded, that the understood purpose was to give a miraculous sanction to the Church of Rome, as the only true visible church of Christ upon earth, and let it be supposed, that the transactions in question were truly miracles,—How does all this affect the evidence which we have for the miracles of Christ? A Roman Catholic might plead that the credit which it reflects on the only true church of Christ, indirectly *strengthens* the evidence of *his* miracles; but in no possible way can it weaken that evidence.

[§] Supposing, then, on the other hand, that the transactions, whether Pagan or Popish, to which Mr Hume refers are not to be regarded as real miracles, but as an imposition on the world,—In

what way can they take from the credit which we would otherwise give to the Christian miracles? If it be on account of the insufficiency of the evidence, that the Pagan and Popish miracles are to be rejected as fictitious, this can be no reason why more perfect evidence should not warrant us to regard the Christian miracles as real. Mr Hume's argument, therefore, seems to be, that the evidence by which the Pagan and Popish miracles are attested is as complete as any that can result from human testimony; that these miracles are, notwithstanding, fictitious; and, consequently, that no human testimony can be sufficient to prove the reality of any miracle.

It will be at once perceived that this is the same conclusion which Mr Hume had previously endeavoured to establish by abstract reasoning. It will, therefore, be considered whether our preceding argument, while it refutes his abstract reasoning, does not also establish the opposite proposition, that miracles *may* be proved by human testimony; for, if so, Mr Hume's new argument must be rejected *in limine*, upon the ground that the case is foreclosed.—But how does Mr Hume get possession of the premises, from which, in his new argument, he can derive his conclusion? The premises are, that the evidence of Pagan and Popish miracles is as complete as any that can result from

human testimony—yet that these miracles are fictitious ; but how does Mr Hume arrive at the knowledge that the Pagan and Popish miracles are fictitious ? Were they actually attested (which I am far from allowing) by as complete evidence as any that can result from human testimony, I could not pronounce them fictitious. Mr Hume seems to find them fictitious for a reason which I cannot sustain. His only reason seems to be, that, in his own opinion, he had previously made it evident that no miracle can be proved by human testimony. Now, this is the very point which he was still endeavouring to establish ; yet, in his premises, he takes it for granted.—In whatever view we consider his new argument, it only leads us back to his old ground, as the only basis on which his conclusion can rest. That ground we have already seen to be untenable, and cannot, therefore, sustain any thing that is built upon it.

But though I must hold it to be altogether gratuitous, so far as concerns Mr Hume's argument, I shall, in the proper place, most gladly refer to what he states as the evidence of Pagan and Popish miracles ; for I shall, in this way, have it in my power to illustrate, by means of contrast, that perfect and satisfying evidence by which the Christian miracles are attested.

SECTION III.

THE NATURE AND NUMBER OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES, AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THEY WERE WROUGHT, AFFORDED SECURITY TO THE WORLD AGAINST DECEPTION, AND, MORE PARTICULARLY, RENDERED IT IMPOSSIBLE THAT THE MEN WHO HAVE ATTESTED THEIR REALITY, COULD THEMSELVES BE DECEIVED.

IN entering on this part of the subject, I have a strong feeling of the importance of what I undertake;—I feel that, upon a successful accomplishment of it, the result of my whole argument in a great measure depends. But I also feel that I have acquired an important advantage for the establishment of the proposition now before us, in a way to which the strictest reasoner cannot object. In a preceding chapter, it has been made to appear, upon grounds which I trust have been completely satisfying,—that the Gospel history is supported by evidence which well entitles us to confide in it as a narrative of facts, so far as they are not miraculous; and, therefore, in reasoning now from the more ordinary facts of the Gospel narrative, for establishing the truth of the miracles,

I shall have no apprehension of my premises being disavowed by any mind, or even of their being admitted with such scruple and hesitation, as might weaken the effect of my argument.

I desire, at the same time, to be understood as limiting the department of facts of which I am entitled fully to avail myself. There is occasional mention made by the Evangelists of what passed between themselves and their Master, or in his presence and theirs, without its being seen or heard by others. In reference to such events, it was impossible that the Gospel narrative (supposing it false) could be contradicted and refuted by those who had an interest in refuting it; and I do not therefore hold that my preceding argument has established the truth of these things. I consider myself as having evinced the authenticity of the Gospel history, in reference to those circumstances only, which, upon the supposition of their being false, could certainly have been disproved, at the time when the narrative of the Evangelists was published; and it is, therefore, of these facts exclusively that I shall make that full and unhesitating use, which I regard as so essential to my future argument. So far as concerns either words or actions of which there were no other witnesses than Christ himself and his Apostles, I shall not otherwise found upon them, than for the purpose

of proving that the Apostles themselves could not be deceived.

These things being premised, I proceed to the immediate business of this Section.

In the case of miracles, the first requisite to our security against deception is, that they be performed in an enlightened age, or among people qualified to detect imposture.

The greater number of fictitious miracles have been imposed on the world in very dark ages ; and the credulity with which weak and unpractised minds have acknowledged them, seems to have exposed to suspicion the wisdom of those who have, in any circumstances, admitted the reality of a miracle. But the very existence of false miracles is rather a presumption that there either has been, or may be, a reality of which they are the counterfeit. Perhaps the prevailing disposition of weak and ignorant men to believe in every false miracle, may even be regarded as a presumption that the natural dictates of the human mind, in its best estate, would lead us so to investigate the claims of miraculous agency, as to give our assent to what appears to be just and true.

At the least, it seems extremely unnatural that the miracles of Christ should be regarded with

suspicion, on account of what has been practised in dark ages. For the age in which *they* were wrought was distinguished from all which had preceded it, by such intellectual light, arising from a superior cultivation of the human mind, as eminently qualified it for the investigation of truth in every department.

The period at which Christ appeared was, in this respect, the most unfavourable that could have been chosen for any scheme of deception; and, viewed in this light, it certainly affords us a corresponding assurance, that an attempt to deceive, if actually made, must have proved ineffectual. The particular period, indeed, seems to have been fixed and determined in the counsels of Heaven, with some reference to this view of the case; and no reasonable mind can deny that there arises from it a certain measure of presumptive evidence for the truth of those miracles by which the Christian faith was established.

It has been said, indeed, that, notwithstanding the learning by which the age in question was distinguished, the Christian miracles were wrought in a barbarous country, and among an ignorant people.

It seems to be the fashion among skeptical philosophers to decry the character and attainments of the Jewish nation, for no other obvious reason

than that the Jews were distinguished from other nations by their religious institutions. Yet, in addressing myself to men who believe in the Supreme and Infinite Being, I can scarcely think it necessary to show that the miracles of Christ ought not to lose credit on account of their having been wrought among the only people on earth who, at the time, had risen superior to the delusions of polytheism,* and actually acknowledged and worshipped the true and living God. It seems but natural to suppose that men who recognised the perfection of the Divine Nature, and had been accustomed to contemplate the ways of God, must have been rather better qualified than others to form a judgment respecting the pretensions of any thing—whether word or deed—which might be represented as proceeding from him.

Even that the Jews were deficient in *human* learning, seems rather a gratuitous assertion. If the divine inspiration of their lawgiver be denied, they who deny it can scarcely refuse to admit that he was a man of very extraordinary attainments. Nor, as we look downward, do we find, in the Jewish nation, much deficiency of illustrious names. In the department of Ethics, the claims of Solomon are certainly respectable. In that of Poetry and other elevated composition, David and Isaiah are not surely to be disregarded. To come down

to the days of Christ himself,—The attainments of Philo and Josephus, even in respect of the language and literature of Greece, will not be lightly thought of by any who are acquainted with their writings.—It is, besides, to be considered, that, at the time in question, Judea had become a Roman province ; and consequently the same advantages for increased civilisation, which Rome afforded to other conquered countries, had been recently extended to the Jewish nation.

If I might here anticipate what concerns, not indeed the miracles of Christ, but those of his Apostles, and other early teachers of Christianity, I might well take strong ground ; for it was not among the Jews alone that *their* miracles were wrought. Though the personal ministry of Christ, and consequently the miracles which he himself performed, were, for wise reasons, confined to Judea and Galilee,—his Apostles, wherever they went for the propagation of the Christian faith, were enabled to work miracles. In every province of the civilized world, they who preached the doctrine of the Gospel also wrought miracles, as an evidence of its coming from God.

Next to the character of the age and the country in which miracles are alleged to be wrought, the circumstances or condition of their Author may

fairly have an influence on the credit which we give to them ;—and this point is the more entitled to attention, because the very circumstances of *outward* condition, which otherwise command our respect for an individual, may, with reason, diminish our confidence in his miracles.

When we read that Vespasian, the Roman Emperor, pretended to work a miraculous cure of two men,—one of them diseased in his eyes, and the other in his hand,—and respecting whose cases the physicians had made a doubtful report,—a fair consideration of the power and influence of an emperor may naturally lead us to suspect, that both the physicians and their patients, with a view to some worldly gain, might be in league with Vespasian for enabling him to impose on the public mind. Even the witnesses of the alleged miracle might be afraid of the consequences to themselves, if they should appear to call in question its reality. On the other hand, considering the miracles of Christ in connexion with the condition of their Author, their claim to our confidence is advanced. He was altogether destitute of worldly power and influence. He had no worldly means of rewarding any man for combining with him to deceive the world. There was nothing that could either deter men from the strictest investigation of his miracles, or make them afraid of exposing any

imposture which they might detect. It was therefore proportionally improbable that a deception should be practised with success in the case of any of the miracles which He wrought.

The purpose or design of fictitious miracles has been, in most cases, accordant with the wishes, if not the prejudices, of those who were allowed to behold them. Sometimes their object has been the support of existing institutions, which the ruling powers were, at the same time, engaged to maintain. The miracles of Christ, on the contrary, were wrought for a purpose to which both the people and the government of his country were disinclined. They were wrought for the establishment of a religion, both opposed to the prejudices of the people, and incompatible with the authority of those who ruled over them. It was not, therefore, possible that these miracles should escape the most severe examination by which imposture could be detected.

The number, at the same time, of the miracles of Christ, and the variety of cases—to human eye unforeseen—in which his miraculous power was exerted, afforded much security against deception.

A fortuitous combination of circumstances may enable an impostor for once to deceive us ; but we

are very differently and more advantageously situate, in reference to one who, from day to day, is prepared and ready to exercise his miraculous power, in proportion as opportunities present themselves for doing so in a way worthy of a miracle. The same individuals have, in these circumstances, an opportunity of watching his procedure from time to time, with all the advantage which their previous observation has afforded them.

When we are expected to recognise miraculous agency in one or a few cases only, out of many in which the call for its exercise seemed to be equally great, there is ground to suspect that the particular cases may have been chosen with a view to means of deception which their particular circumstances afforded. But, so far as concerns the miraculous cure of diseases, we find that none ever applied to Christ in vain. The evidence of his miraculous agency seems, in this view, to defy suspicion ; and the frequent repetition of his miracles, by exciting universal attention, gave that publicity to the transactions in question, which is, with good reason, regarded as one of the best securities against imposture.

Yet it is not less certain that some of the miracles of Christ may be regarded as more important

than others. Though all miracles, when proved to be real, may be held of equal value for attesting a divine mission, because they all imply preternatural agency,—miraculous power may be more *manifest* in one case than in another, because the effect produced is more remarkably distinguished from any thing that is presented to us in the ordinary course of nature ;—and it is obvious that we have, in consequence, more security against deception. We accordingly find that the authors of fictitious miracles have seldom, if ever, sought credit for more than such a preternatural cure of a bodily disease as admitted of various means of deception. But, while the miraculous power of Christ was effectual for the cure of diseases, it was occasionally exercised in a way more unequivocal. The very elements, of which the visible frame of nature is composed, were obedient to his command ; and over death itself he manifested an uncontrolled dominion, by restoring to life, and all the functions of life, men who had been previously subjected to its power.

The views which we have thus taken may aid us, it is hoped, to appreciate more duly the positive evidence by which the miracles of Christ are attested ; but our confidence in them must still depend, chiefly and more immediately, on the cha-

racter of the men who, as eye and ear-witnesses, have borne direct testimony to their reality. The character of these men for truth and integrity will be the separate subject of another Section. In the meanwhile, we are called to consider, whether they were sufficiently qualified to judge of what they have reported to the world, or were, on the contrary, likely to be themselves deceived respecting those things to which they have borne witness.

The qualifications in this case required cannot, with reason, be estimated as higher than what are very generally possessed ; for much of the testimony of the Apostles resolves into a simple statement of what they had seen and heard ; and, so far as it involves an opinion or judgment of accompanying circumstances, it will be found, as we proceed, that these circumstances were of such a nature as not to be above the comprehension and estimate of a very ordinary mind.

It may be said, however, that the Apostles of Christ were ignorant enthusiasts, and that, under the influence of enthusiasm, not only the understandings of men, but even their bodily senses, may be deceived.

Were this allegation admitted, it would still fall

short of accounting for deception in regard to many of Christ's miracles ; for many of them were wrought in the presence of a multitude, consisting not of his friends only, but partly of his enemies, men who could not be the dupes of the same enthusiasm. Had the Apostles, under the influence of enthusiasm, imagined that they saw what was not visible, or heard what was not spoken, would not their mistake have been corrected by those other witnesses, whose bodily senses were not subject to the same illusion ? If it be urged, that the Apostles had it still in their power to refuse being corrected, I might fairly reply, that their conduct would, in this case, have resolved itself into *dishonesty*, which is not a point at present in question ; their honesty or dishonesty is to be afterwards considered. But, on the supposition that they had continued to assert what the bodily senses of other witnesses (enemies of Christ) contradicted, would the last-mentioned witnesses have silently acquiesced in such an impudent and flagrant misrepresentation ? Or would not their counter-statement have been eagerly laid hold of, and made public, by the Jewish rulers, interested, as they certainly were, to disprove the reality of the miracles ?

I have so far reasoned on a supposition that

the Apostles were ignorant enthusiasts ; but what ground is there to suspect them of enthusiasm ?— In the view of some men it may, perhaps, seem that their having borne witness to their Master's miracles is itself sufficient ground for the charge ; but this argument takes for granted the very point at issue, for it proceeds on a supposition that the miracles of Christ were not real. If no other reason, therefore, can be assigned for suspecting them of enthusiasm, it is clear that, in the absence of all proof, and on that ground alone, they might be acquitted of the charge. But, however gratuitous it may be in this case to prove a negative, it should not be difficult to satisfy any candid reader, that some of the Apostles were distinguished by those characteristics of mind which are most directly opposed to enthusiasm. We have seen that two of their number, *Matthew* and *John*, unquestionably wrote those books of the Gospel history which bear their respective names ; and it is impossible for any unprejudiced mind to peruse what they have written, without perceiving unequivocal indications of all the caution and sobriety of mind which can entitle a witness to our respect and confidence. There is the strongest evidence of their having been under the influence of much humility and diffidence ; and they may, on that account, be the less respected

by some men ; but humility and diffidence are the parents of caution ;—they are the accompaniments of any thing rather than enthusiasm.

Even the charge of ignorance,—so far as ignorance could affect the testimony which the Apostles bore,—is obviously unfounded. No man, who reads the writings to which I have referred, can maintain that their authors were ignorant, in any such sense as to be disqualified for bearing witness to the things which they have recorded ;—nor was the outward condition of the Apostles such as to warrant a presumption of the ignorance with which they have been charged. *Matthew* was a publican, or collector of the public revenue,—an office which indicated a rank in society considerably superior to the meanest, and must have required some education to qualify him for the discharge of its duties. The two sons of Zebedee also (*James* and *John*)—though denominated fishermen—were of such a station as to have hired servants under them, whom they left with their father, when Jesus called them to follow him. In short, every circumstance leads us to conclude, that the Apostles were of such a rank in society, as is perfectly consistent with our supposing their minds to have been in a considerable degree cultivated and invigorated,—though not by tuition in the

schools of the learned,—yet by such converse with the world and the business of the world, as did not, perhaps, constitute a worse preparation for their judging of the miracles which their Master wrought.

But, supposing the Apostles to have been more ignorant than we have ground to believe, there was one circumstance in their condition which seems to have precluded a possibility of their being deceived respecting their Master's miracles. While they were in the course of witnessing his miracles, they were themselves sent forth by Him, with a commission to work miracles in his name,—with “power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease;”^{*} and we are accordingly informed, that they exercised this power. Shall it be supposed that they were deceived respecting their own miracles? It may be more supposable that they contrived to deceive others; but that is not the point at present in question. Is it possible to suppose that, with their bodily senses to guide them, and not absolutely insane, they could believe themselves to be, from day to day, employed in working miracles, while they had neither re-

^{*} Matth. chap. x. ver. 1.

ceived nor exercised any such power? Or, admitting their own experience of miraculous power, derived from the Master whom they served, shall we still suppose them incompetent witnesses of *his* miracles,—incompetent even to report, for the consideration of others, the facts and circumstances, submitted to their bodily senses, on the ground of which they believed that miracles had been wrought by him?

With the advantage of these general views, let us now attend to some of the miracles of Christ in detail, and to the circumstances in which they were wrought, in order to our appreciating more duly that security against deception, which these circumstances afforded.

We shall find, as I have already hinted, that the circumstances attending some of the transactions in question, afforded security against deception, not only to the friends of Christ, but also to his enemies—to the very men who were interested and watchful to detect imposture,—and that, even when this advantage was not extended to others, it was fully and unequivocally enjoyed by those who were to bear witness to the reality of the miracles.

For the illustration of what I thus assert, let me begin with adverting to a case in which Christ is said to have afforded a miraculous supply of food to a multitude. There are two such miracles recorded, but we may confine our attention to one of them.

Jesus, we are told, had retired into a desert place, and many people, having seen his miracles, had followed him. But when they had been with him for a considerable time, during which he had spoken to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and had "healed them that had need of healing," it was found that the multitude had nothing to eat. In these circumstances Jesus said unto his disciples—"How many loaves have ye? Go and see; and, when they knew, they said—Five, and two fishes." Having received this answer, "He commanded them to make the multitude sit down by companies upon the green grass; and they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties. He then took the five loaves and blessed them, and brake, and distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise the two fishes divided he among them all: And when they had all eaten and were filled, the disciples took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. And

they that had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.”*

This miracle had the advantage of being performed in the presence of many who were afterwards offended with Christ, and refused to acknowledge his divine mission. It was but for a short time that many of the multitude sought after him ; for their motive in following him was, not that they had seen his miracles, but that they had eaten of the loaves, and were filled. It was, therefore, impossible that the outward and visible circumstances of the miracle could be misrepresented by the Evangelists, without their misrepresentation being contradicted by a host of opposing witnesses. Nor is it easy to conceive how it was possible for either the Apostles or the multitude to be deceived. Every individual of the multitude must have known whether he actually received a portion of the food which was distributed ;—and, in consequence of their being placed in ranks,—each consisting of a fixed number, it was rendered the more easy to ascertain whether the wants of all were supplied.

It is not imaginable, indeed, that every indivi-

* Matth. xiv. ver. 17—21. Mark, vi. ver. 37—44. Luke, ix. ver. 13—17.

dual of such a multitude received his portion immediately from the hand of one of the Apostles ; the case obviously required another mode of distribution, well calculated for ascertaining the reality of the miracle. In consequence of the people being seated in ranks or rows, it was only necessary that the Apostles should give a portion to an individual of each rank, directing him to hand to others what he did not himself consume. But, without maintaining what is at all *hypothetical*, I hold it to be sufficient for my present purpose, that the Apostles could not supply all the individuals of such a multitude, without somehow employing the people themselves in the requisite distribution. If this be admitted, I know not how we can avoid concluding, that the bread and the fish distributed must have been miraculously enlarged, not only in the hands of Christ and those of his Apostles, but also in the hands of the multitude. Every individual, in appropriating what was sufficient for his own use, and yet imparting to others a portion nearly the same with that which had been given to himself, must have been conscious, one would think, of a miraculous agency, for which he had the evidence of his bodily senses. It was, therefore, impossible, on this supposition, that the people could be deceived by means of Christ and his Apostles obtaining in any natural

way the requisite quantity of food for the purpose in question.

But if any man can imagine that food sufficient for the consumption of five thousand men, besides women and children, was produced and regularly distributed, under the mask or disguise of merely dividing among them five loaves and two fishes, and that this was done in the face of all the multitude, without its being in their power to detect the imposture,—even the man who deludes his mind with this imagination, will find it more difficult to persuade himself that the Apostles, also, could be ignorant of the deception which was practised on others. They were with their Master in a desert place; whatever stock of provisions they had he and they must have brought along with them. From what we historically know of their manner of life and their journeyings, it was impossible that any great stock should have been carried, without the knowledge of all concerned,—most probably, not without the assistance of all. We have their own authority for saying, that, so far as they knew, or could find upon inquiry, there were only five loaves and two fishes. Shall we suppose that their Master had, notwithstanding, and without their knowledge, the possession and immediate command of provisions adequate to the

wants of more than five thousand people, and that he could also find such access to this stock of provisions as, in a short time, to produce the whole for the purpose in question, without the Apostles even observing from what place and from what store it was procured ?

If this absurd imagination be not entertained, the Apostles themselves could not be deceived ; either the miracle must have been real, or they must have been aware of the deception. Perhaps I might conclude that, in the peculiar circumstances which have been stated, not the Apostles alone, but all who beheld the miracle, had security against deception. But there is no need for maintaining such a conclusion upon ground that is in any degree questionable ;—there are other cases to be considered in which the evidence of it will be found irresistible.

The day after Jesus had delivered his sermon on the plain, “ He went to a city called *Nain* ; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow ; and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had

compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier ; and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.”*

There seems to have been nothing in this case that could render it difficult for the witnesses to form a judgment of what passed, nor any thing wanting that could afford equal security against deception to all who beheld the transaction. The narrative is not more simple than the transaction itself was unencumbered in its circumstances. All that passed was in the presence of a large concourse of people. Much people had come with Jesus, and there was much people accompanying the body of the young man, in order to its being laid in the grave. The circumstances were all cognizable by their bodily senses ; and whatever impression they made on one man was liable to be corrected by the observation of another. The pretensions of the transaction were, at the same time, unambiguous ; what the people saw was either a gross imposition, or it was unequivocally a miracle.

* Luke, chap. vii. ver. 11—15.

Considering the case, then, as it came under their view, could the witnesses of the transaction reasonably adopt any other conclusion than that what they had beheld was miraculous? Or was it possible that, in adopting this conclusion, they could be deceived?

If they did not acknowledge the reality of the miracle, they must, of necessity, have supposed that the young man had not been truly dead. But how was this supposition to be justified? It could scarcely be supposed that the afflicted mother, and the multitude who appeared to sympathize with her, had resolved to lay the young man in the grave, without being convinced that he was dead. Perhaps it may rather be said, that the appearances of death are sometimes illusory, and that the relations of the young man might be in a mistake when they supposed him to be dead. But how could their mistake, or the opposite truth of the case, be known to Christ? Had he better means of judging than theirs,—or *any natural* means of ascertaining the precise period when the person, who had appeared to be dead, would be so restored as to be able, at once, to sit up and to speak? There is no ground for supposing that, before meeting the bier, Christ had even seen the person in question, for he had been previously at a distance from Nain. Nor will it serve any pur-

pose to suppose that he had a preternatural communication of the truth in reference to the young man's condition, and the time of his recovery ; for this would be admitting one miracle, in order to evade the obligation of acknowledging another. The ultimate resort, therefore, of those who would deny the reality of the miracle, must be—that the young man and his mother, and all concerned, had a secret understanding with Christ, and that a living man was laid upon the bier, with an assurance that Christ would meet the pretended funeral, and call unto the man to arise. But this improbable supposition is rendered more improbable, by a circumstance to which I have already adverted. For Christ had not been previously in the city or neighbourhood of Nain, to hold the communications which were requisite for such a deceitful and complicated purpose. He had but just arrived after a long journey, and had not got farther than the gates of the city, when he met the bier and those who accompanied it.

I am aware that a man who is not called to prove any thing, and is at liberty to meet the argument of others with any supposition which does not involve an impossibility, may still refuse to abandon the supposition to which I have last adverted ; and, consequently, if the miracle now in

question were the only one by which the divine mission of Christ is attested, it might be said that the proof is not so complete as to be irresistible. But, considering the number of cases in which the evidence of Christ's miraculous agency is not to be otherwise resisted than by some supposition as unnatural as that to which I now refer, I should certainly hold, were it necessary, that, from the number of such cases combined, the moral evidence resulting is undeniable. If I seem to relinquish this ground, it is only because there are other miracles of Christ which afforded such security against imposture, as makes it altogether impossible to suppose that either the Apostles, or the other witnesses, could be in any way deceived.

As an example of what I now assert, let me next request attention to the account which is given us of the resurrection of *Lazarus*.

The peculiar importance attached to this miracle, and the publicity of its circumstances, make it impossible to suppose that the enemies of Christ should not have detected and exposed even the slightest misrepresentation in the detailed account of it, with which we are furnished in the Gospel history. We may, therefore, fearlessly trust to the authenticity of the circumstances recorded.

But, referring my reader to the Evangelical narrative itself, for a full account of this transaction,* I shall advert to its circumstances, only as they may seem to bear on the object which I have immediately in view.

The ultimate point to be, in this case, established is, that a person, who had been truly dead, was restored to life by Divine and preternatural agency, accompanying an outward and visible interposition of Christ for that particular purpose; and the immediate question is, whether there are not circumstances of the case, as recorded by the Evangelist, which render it impossible that the witnesses of the transaction, and especially those who have reported it as miraculous—could themselves be deceived.

One of the first securities against deception, in any extraordinary case, is that we be not taken by surprise,—that we be, on the contrary, led to expect, and consequently prepared for witnessing, a wonderful occurrence. Was this advantage enjoyed by the Apostles of Christ, and the other witnesses of the Resurrection of Lazarus?

The Apostles must have been aware that Christ either did work miracles, or pretended to do so;—

* John, chap. xi. ver. 1—46.

they could not have forgotten what they had witnessed in the case of the daughter of Jairus, and in that of the son of the widow of Nain. Consequently, any indication of their Master's design to afford similar evidence of his miraculous power, was calculated to excite all the attention which they could possibly give;—and he accordingly warned them of what they should see. Immediately on his receiving intelligence of the sickness of Lazarus,—and while hitherto at a distance from Bethany—on the other side of Jordan,—he intimated to them that the sickness of their friend was to be “for the glory of God,—that the Son of God might be thereby glorified.” He, notwithstanding, abode in the same place for two days, during which they had leisure to reflect on what he had intimated. He then gave them renewed notice of his design;—“Our friend *Lazarus*,” said he—“our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep;” and, in consequence of their supposing that he spoke of nothing more than “taking rest in sleep,” he added, in plain and literal terms—“Lazarus is dead.” He, at the same time, warned them more explicitly of what they might expect to behold;—“I am glad,” said he, “for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent that ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.”

It is impossible that the Apostles of Christ, in these circumstances, should have witnessed the procedure at Bethany with careless or inattentive eyes, or should not have been fully prepared for reporting what was there presented to their bodily senses.

But had the other witnesses of the miracle any corresponding advantage ?

They were friends or acquaintances of the family of Lazarus, who had come from Jerusalem, to comfort Martha and Mary concerning the death of their brother. According to the custom of the times, in similar cases, the number of these visitors was great ;—and, in addition to all that they must have heard in Jerusalem, about alleged miracles of Christ, they had, no doubt, heard much, both of himself and his miraculous power, from the family of Lazarus, with whom they were themselves acquainted, and with whom Christ had been long and intimately conversant. Yet we have good evidence that they were not all predisposed to acknowledge his Divine Mission. Some of them had minds prejudiced against this acknowledgment ;—and *we*, in consequence, have the advantage of knowing that they would not fail to watch his procedure, with a view to detect imposture. We are expressly told that, while many of

those, who beheld the miracle, believed in Christ, there were others who, in defiance of all they had seen, went away to the Pharisees, and gave them such information of what had been done, as led to their taking counsel against him. We have, therefore, the advantage of being assured, that what Christ did was in the presence of some individuals, who must have been willing, if it had been in their power, both to contradict and disprove the report of his friends.

Such being the mixed character of the visitors in the house of Lazarus, the course of events was so ordered, that they were led to go where Jesus was. When Mary, upon hearing of his arrival, rose up hastily and went out, we are told that they followed her,—saying, “She goeth to the grave to weep there.” They, in consequence, saw and heard Mary, when she fell down at the feet of Christ, saying—“Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” She plainly intimated, in these words, her belief that Christ, if he had been present, would have wrought a miracle for the recovery of her brother;—and some of the people around her added—“Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?”

It is therefore clear, in the first place, that the witnesses were aware of the claim of Christ to miraculous power ; and it will be found, in the next place, that the steps of his procedure towards the performance of the miracle were such as must have fully awakened their attention, by convincing them that the hour was arrived when they should either behold a very interesting miracle, or be enabled to detect imposture.

On meeting the sisters and other friends of Lazarus, "Jesus groaned in spirit, and said, Where have ye laid him ? They say unto him—Lord, come and see ;—Jesus wept ;—Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him !" On their approaching the grave, it proved to be a cave, and there was a stone lying upon it. "Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him—Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her—Said I not unto thee that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God ? Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid."—It seems impossible that any individual present should not have been aware that the circumstances thus recorded were a preparation for either a real or a pretended miracle. Yet, in order to warn them

more perfectly both of his design to work a miracle, and of the purpose for which it was to be wrought,—“ Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said—Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me; and I know that thou hearest me always ; but, because of the people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.”

The outward preparation was now completed ; and, if any outward means could have the effect, the minds of all who surrounded the grave must have been prepared for giving due attention to what might be presented to their bodily senses.

In these circumstances—after the stone which covered the grave had been, in their presence, removed, and while they, in consequence, looked towards the dead body,—Jesus “ cried with a loud voice—Lazarus, come forth ; and he that had been dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes ;—and Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.”

Was there any thing in the circumstances of this miracle that could leave the witnesses at a loss to form a decisive judgment of what they had beheld ? All the objects around were so familiar to them, as to be readily and distinctly recognised.

They were not strangers to the appearance and voice of the person who wrought the miracle ; they must all have seen and heard him in the Temple. Lazarus, also, had been so well known to them, that they could be at no loss about the identity of his person. Nor was it possible that they should afterwards entertain an apprehension of their senses having been deceived respecting it, or deceived with any illusory appearance of his restoration to life. For, without resting on what seems to have been the truth—that Lazarus lived many years after his resurrection, it is sufficient, for our present purpose, to know that, when Christ was, at a future time, in the village of Bethany, the family of Lazarus prepared for him an entertainment, of which Lazarus himself partook,—being one of them (we are told) “ who sat at table,”—and that much people of the Jews, knowing that Christ was there, “ came, not for his sake only, but that they might see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead.”*

The only question, therefore, that could remain for consideration was—whether Lazarus had been truly dead. If he had been dead, and was now alive, it was impossible that the eye and ear-wit-

* John, chap. xii. ver. 2—9.

nesses of what had passed at his grave could honestly entertain a doubt of his having been restored to life by preternatural agency, accompanying an outward and visible interposition of Christ.

On what ground, then, or in what way, can we imagine it possible that Lazarus had not been dead? I am not forgetting what I formerly admitted, that the appearances of death are sometimes illusory. But, supposing that the sisters of Lazarus, and all concerned, had proceeded on a false imagination of his being dead,—I ask the same question which I virtually put in a former case;—How could Christ be aware (without such a preternatural communication as would itself have been a miracle) that one whose appearance and functions as a living agent had, to say the least, been suspended, would be enabled, on a certain day, and at a certain hour, again to take his place in the society of the living? There is a circumstance in the case of Lazarus which renders this question unanswerable on the part of those who would deny the reality of the miracle. In reference to the son of the widow of Nain, I admitted a possibility, (however improbable the supposition,) that the young man and his mother, and all concerned, might have a secret understanding with Christ. But, in the case of Lazarus, such a supposition is altogether impossible; for he had

been four days in the grave. Respecting the time of his funeral—an event so recent—there could not be a question. Had there been a misrepresentation respecting it, a hundred tongues would at once have proclaimed the fallacy. His sister *Martha*, indeed, at the moment before his resurrection, publicly referred to the time during which he had been dead, or rather, had lain in the grave,* as a reason why it might be offensive to remove the stone by which the mouth of the cave was covered : and it is impossible to suppose, that in what she said upon this point, she could be practising any deceit, for she was in the presence of many, both friends and enemies of Christ, to whom the truth must have been known. She rather appears to have been made an *unconscious* instrument of appealing to them, for the more perfect establishment of that primary fact, on which the evidence of the miracle was to depend.

When all the circumstances of this miracle are considered, in connexion with their publicity and

* In the observation made by Martha, the word *dead*, is improperly supplied by the translators of the New Testament. The original words denote nothing more than continuance in a certain state or place for four days ; and, from the words of the Evangelist, at the 17th verse of the chapter, we learn that during all that time Lazarus had lain in the grave.

notoriety, it appears impossible that any imposition could be practised with effect. The transaction commanded, as might be supposed, the immediate attention of the Jewish rulers. They had it in their power to contradict and disprove any misrepresentation of what had passed ; and, upon the ground formerly stated, (Chap. II.,) it is morally impossible that they should have failed to do so, if the circumstances on which our argument is founded had not been at the time undeniable.—I am not conscious of having rested more on any of these circumstances than what the common sense of mankind, as well as the strictest principles of reasoning, will justify. Nor am I conscious that, in the circumstantial evidence, as stated, there is any element wanting to render it complete. I do not, therefore, hesitate to say, that though there were no other miracle of Christ to which we could appeal, men, who call themselves by his name, would have no cause to shrink from the task of justifying their faith in his divine mission.

Yet our attention is called in the Gospel history to another miracle—the Resurrection of Christ himself—as the more peculiar ground of our Christian faith. We find an Apostle appealing to this miracle with such confidence, that he seems

willing to forego every other evidence of the divine mission of Christ, for the purpose of resting his claim to faith and acceptance on his resurrection alone.—“ If Christ be not risen,” saith Paul, “ then is our preaching vain, and your faith also is vain.”*

There is one circumstance, indeed, in the history of Christ's Resurrection, or rather of the preparation for that event, which, notwithstanding all that he had previously done, might have entitled the world to reject him, if it had not been made evident that he had risen from the dead. From the opening to the close of his ministry on earth, he gave frequent notices of his resurrection, and ultimately in such terms of explicit promise, that he must have forfeited his claim to confidence, if the promise had not been fulfilled.

But we shall find, on the other hand, that such intimations and promises, when viewed in connexion with the direct evidence of their fulfilment, have a powerful tendency to corroborate that evidence.

The first intimation that Jesus was to rise from the state of the dead, was given in figurative language. “ Destroy this temple,” said he, speak-

* 1st Cor. chap. xv. ver. 14.

ing of the temple of his own body, “and in three days I will raise it up again.”* The next intimation was literal and explicit. Having revealed himself to his immediate disciples, as the Christ or the promised Messiah, he took an opportunity of intimating to them plainly what awaited him on earth—that he “must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and *be raised the third day.*”† To what he had thus announced, he afterwards referred, in converse with three of his disciples, who had been witnesses of his transfiguration. “Tell the vision,” said he, “to no man, till the Son of Man be risen again from the dead.”‡ But lest his former and explicit intimation should have been either forgotten or misunderstood, he also took an early opportunity of re-stating what he had before intimated. “The Son of Man,” said he, “is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him, and, after that he is killed, *he shall rise the third day.*”§ When his ministry on earth was near to its close, it became of increased importance that this interesting communication should be renewed, in order to its strengthening the evidence of the Resurrection. At the very time, therefore,

* John, chap. ii. ver. 19.

† Luke, chap. ix. ver. 22.

‡ Matth. chap. xvii. ver. 9.

§ Mark, chap. ix. ver. 31.

when he was on his way to Jerusalem, with a view to suffer what had been predicted concerning the Messiah, he took his twelve disciples apart, and said unto them—"The Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles; and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him, *and the third day he shall rise again.*"* Last of all, he warned his disciples that, "*after he should be risen again*, he would go before them into Galilee."†

It was impossible that such intimations and promises, in the event of their being duly fulfilled, should not materially strengthen the evidence of Christ's divine mission. I do not rest on the circumstance that the warning which he gave to his disciples was calculated to render them watchful of what might be realized; for we know that it had not this effect. Notwithstanding all the promises which he had given them, they had no hope of his rising from the grave. But, when they actually beheld him alive, after they had been witnesses of his death, the recollection of what he had said about his resurrection, must have made a

* Mark, chap. x. ver. 33, 34.

† Matth. chap. xxvi. ver. 32.

deep and satisfying impression on their minds. I do not say that the testimony of their bodily senses could stand in need of being thereby strengthened. But his previous intimations and promises, when they were visibly accomplished, had the effect of combining a fulfilment of prophecy with the most stupendous of all miracles. The Resurrection, considered in this view, presented to the minds of the disciples, a miracle of knowledge, combined with a miracle of power;—and the person, who foretold the event, did not merely manifest, as in other prophetic intimations, such a knowledge of what was future, as surpassed the reach of human sagacity, but made it evident that he had such an intimate acquaintance with the counsels of Heaven, as reached to a previous understanding of the time and way in which the great Ruler of the universe would be pleased to supersede one of the established laws of nature.

It may perhaps be supposed, and urged as an objection, that the previous notices of Christ's Resurrection were not communicated to more than his twelve immediate disciples. Had this been the case, the advantage would still have been great, for it was upon their testimony, in particular, that the faith of others was to be established. But we have evidence that, before the death of

Christ, he gave such notices or warnings of his resurrection, as reached the ears of his enemies. The Evangelist Matthew informs us, that after the crucifixion and burial of Christ, "The chief priests and the pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again."* From the manner in which this circumstance is stated by the Evangelist, it seems to have been a matter of public notoriety. In consequence of the men in question having gone "together," or in a body, to the Roman governor, the fact had been generally known; and it, accordingly, remained uncontradicted.

The Jewish rulers had, therefore, the full advantage of having been put on their guard against any attempt to counterfeit a resurrection; and, from the advantage which they thus enjoyed, we shall find that not only the rulers themselves, but the men to whom a risen Saviour was afterwards preached, had strong security against deception.

The pledge or promise which Christ had given of his own resurrection was, at the least, calculated to awaken attention; for it was a criterion altogether unexampled, both of sincerity and of

* Matth. chap. xxvii. ver. 62, 63.

power. A manifestation of power which required the person affording it to die as an intermediate step, had never before been proposed to the world. From the fulfilment of such a pledge,—if it should, indeed, be fulfilled,—the most important consequences were to be anticipated. The Jewish rulers had, therefore, a deep interest in preventing the people from being led astray by any false pretence of its fulfilment; and they had it also in their power to prevent the possibility of any such imposition. They had only to make sure, in the first place, of Christ being really dead, and then to take care that his body should be in safe custody till the determined period of three days should be fully expired. It is obvious that, without a miracle to defeat this measure, they must have had it in their power, after three days, to exhibit the dead body to the view of the people, as a complete proof of Christ's promise having failed, and, consequently, of his having been, from the beginning, an impostor.

It is therefore essential to keep in view the way in which the Jewish rulers actually proceeded.

Any supposition that they did not make sure of Christ being dead, would be, in the circumstances of the case, very unnatural,—incapable of being reconciled either with their personal hatred of

him, or with the apprehension, which they entertained, that there might be a pretence of a resurrection. We accordingly know that extraordinary means were employed for ascertaining the reality of his death. To hasten the death of the malefactors, who were crucified along with him, their limbs were broken. But when the soldiers who were employed in this service came to Christ, —though they “saw that he was dead already,” they adopted a far more effectual expedient, than that of breaking his limbs, for putting his death out of question;—We are told that one of them so pierced his side with a spear, that “forthwith came there out blood and water.”* Whether the issue of blood and, at the same time, of water be a proof, as has been maintained, of the soldier’s spear having pierced the *pericardium*, is a point of which I am not qualified to judge. But the wound appears to have been both intended and calculated to accomplish the purpose of his enemies, by making sure of his death; and we accordingly know that, after his resurrection, no such pretence, as that of his not having been truly dead, was ever urged by the Jewish rulers. We shall, besides, find, upon other ground, that such a pretence (had there been room for it) could not

* John, chap. xix. ver. 34.

have availed in the circumstances of the case ; for the subsequent procedure of the Jewish rulers was such as made it incumbent on them, after the expiration of the third day, to produce the body of Christ, whether dead or alive.

When the chief priests and pharisees came, as we have seen, to the Roman governor, and gave him notice of what Christ had said about his rising again after three days, it was with a view to a request, which in their circumstances was most natural. “ Command, therefore, (said they to Pilate,) that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead ; so the last error shall be worse than the first. And Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch, go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.”*

In order to our judging more perfectly of the obligation under which the Jewish rulers were brought by this part of the transaction, and of its consequent importance in our present argument, it is necessary to remember that the circumstances

* Matth. chap. xxvii. ver. 64—66.

of Christ's burial had been, in common with other things, wisely ordered in Providence, for affording complete and equal advantage to both his enemies and his friends, for ascertaining either the imposture or the reality of his promised resurrection. Had his body been carelessly thrown into the promiscuous heap of those who had been put to death as malefactors, it might have been nearly impossible, either for the Jewish rulers to guard against the body being stolen, or for the disciples to vindicate themselves against the charge of having stolen it ;—perhaps, after three days, there might even have been a question about the identity of the body. But the manner in which Christ was buried, afforded every advantage for ascertaining the truth. With the leave of the Roman governor, Joseph of Arimathea took the body, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in a rock,—to which, of course, there could be no other access than by the door ;—and not only was Joseph himself careful to shut the door, by rolling to it a great stone,—the Jewish rulers made it sure—as sure as human means could accomplish—by sealing the stone and setting a watch.

What, then, are we to expect as the result of such precaution ?—If the Jewish rulers are ulti-

mately to deny the Resurrection, it may certainly be expected, that after the determined period of three days, they shall either produce the body of Christ, or give some satisfactory account of the means of violence by which it had been taken out of their power. Yet in both these points they completely fail. The tomb is confessedly empty; and that any violent means had been employed for carrying off the body cannot even be pretended; for not one of the guard (it would seem) has even a wound or a scratch to shew as a proof of his having been engaged in any struggle. It is, therefore, alleged, that the body was *stolen*,—that the soldiers on guard had been all asleep, and that the disciples had, in the mean time, broken into the sepulchre and carried off the body of their Master, without one of the soldiers being, all the while, awakened. If this account of the matter is not to be rejected as in itself incredible, the natural question must be,—Who beheld the alleged procedure, so as to be qualified to report it to others? The only persons who report it, are men who, by their own account, could not behold it—those very soldiers who pretend to have been, during the whole transaction, in such a profound sleep, that even the means employed for breaking open the door had not the effect of awakening them.—We have the best right to say, that this

account of the matter, however absurd, is the only one which the Jewish rulers ever gave ; for we have seen, that the Gospel history, which contains this, as their first account of it, and asserts it to be still their common saying, was published to the world, while it was completely in their power to contradict and disprove any misrepresentation of the case : Yet, in no writing or argument against Christianity, do we find any contradiction of what is thus said to have been the apology or pretence of the Jewish rulers.

I am far from saying that the presumptive evidence of Christ's resurrection, arising from this view of the case, however strong it must be regarded, should supersede a demand for direct and positive proof. But I desire to ask, in the mean time, whether the whole circumstances which I have partly referred to, and partly detailed, did not originally afford to the world strong security against deception ?

Perhaps that faithful record of these circumstances, which we have now in our hands, affords to us even a greater advantage. They who lived at the time of Christ's death and resurrection, could not all participate equally of the advantage which I have illustrated. Though some of them were personally conversant with the circumstances

which I have brought under review, many more must have derived their information from the report of others, before that report had stood the test of the severe scrutiny, to which it could not fail to be either directly or indirectly subjected by the Jewish rulers. But, in our day, every man is equally enabled to build his faith on the foundation of such written and recorded evidence as originally challenged and defied objection, and has been transmitted to us in a way which cannot fail to satisfy any candid mind.

Those men, indeed, who have borne witness to Christ's resurrection, could not be much in want on their own account, of such security against deception as resulted from the circumstances which we have been considering. But, from such a retrospective view of the case, even their minds must have derived much satisfaction; and it remains to be considered, whether they had not at the same time, such direct and unquestionable means of knowledge respecting what they have attested, as forbid all supposition of their having been deceived.

If this point can be established, it may perhaps be less necessary to say much about the *number* of the witnesses; for ten, twenty, or thirty men,

against whose credibility there is no ground of suspicion, will afford to a candid mind, very nearly as much satisfaction respecting the truth of what they attest, as could be derived from the corresponding testimony of ten, twenty, or thirty thousand. But the number of persons who saw Christ, and conversed with him after his resurrection, is a matter of more importance, in respect of its having afforded to each individual increased security against deception, by enabling him to compare the result of his own observation,—his own remembrance of what he had seen and heard—with the corresponding observation and testimony of others. It is, therefore, satisfying to know, that not only the Apostles, and some others to whom Christ had been most intimately known, but five hundred brethren, who had seen him at once, bore witness either directly or indirectly to the same truth. Their continued profession, indeed, of the Christian faith, was itself a continued testimony to their belief in the resurrection.

But it is more important to consider that the Apostles of Christ, in particular, as persons selected to bear witness of his having risen, had the advantage of seeing him and conversing with him,—not once only, or in circumstances favourable to any thing like deceit or illusion,—but on various

occasions, and in all the variety of circumstances which could tend to satisfy the most jealous mind. They conversed with him both in public and in private,—in the fields, during the light of day, when all that passed was open to the observation of others,—and also in chambers to which they had retired, where there was no object to withdraw their attention from either his personal appearance or what dropped from his lips. Their interviews appear to have been deliberate, and attended with all the circumstances to which they had been previously accustomed ;—they sat at meat with him, and received from him, at the same time, spiritual instruction—direction and consolation respecting their duty as his Apostles, and respecting all that awaited them in the world. As a farther proof of his identity,—if more could be required,—they saw him perform a miracle, very similar in its circumstances to one which he had wrought in their presence before his crucifixion and death.

It has been objected, indeed, that, on two occasions, to which I have referred, Christ is represented as having come to his disciples in the chamber where they were assembled, notwithstanding that “ the doors were shut (fastened it would seem) for fear of the Jews.” It has been argued, from this circumstance, that it could be only the

disembodied spirit of Christ that appeared to his disciples. But on what ground can it be either denied, or thought at all improbable, that the miraculous power, which Christ exerted for other purposes, was employed in this case for the purpose of drawing the bolts or fastenings of the doors? We are informed, in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, that an angel of the Lord, on one occasion, opened the doors of a common prison for the deliverance of the Apostles of Christ; and, though it is not there said that the angel again fastened the doors, we are left to conclude that he had done so; for, in the morning, the officers of the Jewish council reported, that “the prison-doors they found shut with all safety, but found no man within.” Equally satisfying is the proof (though no mention be made of the fact) that, in the case before us, the bolts or fastenings, if not otherwise drawn, must have been removed by the miraculous power of Christ; for we shall find that, after he came into the chamber in which the Apostles were assembled, he gave them undeniable evidence that he was not a disembodied spirit, but had flesh and bones like themselves.

It had been wisely ordered, in providence, that the Apostles should be slow to believe in the resurrection of their Master. After they had wit-

nessed his death, they were so far from bethinking themselves of what he had said about rising again, that they appear to have given up all hope of the cause in which they had been engaged. We are accordingly informed, that when they saw him, for the first time, after his resurrection, "they were terrified, and supposed that they had seen a spirit,"—partly, it may be, because they knew that the doors of the chamber had been fastened. But this faithless imagination was soon dispelled; and, in the meantime, it served the purpose for which it was intended in the providence of God,—that of procuring, not only for them, but for all who should "believe in Christ through their word," stronger and more perfect evidence of the reality of his resurrection. "Behold my hands and my feet (said he) that it is I myself; handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have."—"Have ye here (added he) any meat?" and they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and of an honey-comb, and he took it, and did eat before them." *

For the better accomplishment of the gracious purpose of Heaven, the course of events was so ordered that, on the occasion to which I have now referred, the Apostle Thomas was not present with

* Luke, chap. xxiv. ver. 39—43.

his brethren, and that he was not to be convinced by their report. “Except I shall see in his hands (said Thomas) the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.”* The incredulity of Thomas was, no doubt, highly blameable ; but, considered in connexion with its result, it enables us, at the present day, to repose additional confidence in his testimony ;—for at the very next meeting with the Apostles, Christ condescendingly said to him—“Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands ; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side ; and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him—My Lord and my God !” †

* John, chap. xx. ver. 25.

† John, chap. xx. ver. 27, 28.

SECTION IV.

THE APOSTLES OF CHRIST, WHO HAVE BORNE WITNESS TO HIS MIRACLES, (WHILE THEY COULD NOT THEMSELVES BE DECEIVED,) GAVE SUCH EVIDENCE OF THEIR OWN TRUTH AND INTEGRITY, AS RENDERS IT IMPOSSIBLE TO SUPPOSE THAT THEY INTENDED TO DECEIVE OTHERS.

THE great body of the people who beheld the miracles of Christ, though they had strong security against deception, have not transmitted to succeeding generations, any report and testimony of what they had seen. All the advantage, therefore, which we derive from the means and opportunities of satisfaction which were afforded to them—to both the friends and the enemies of Christ—is an assurance that, in the case of his miracles, the procedure was open and fair, and that, if imposture could have been detected, a communication of it would have been made to the Jewish rulers. Perhaps this may not be regarded as an unimportant circumstance, by minds which are accustomed to consider and weigh circumstantial evidence. But it is well known that a competent number of men were selected by

Christ for bearing witness of his miracles to the world, and, more particularly, for giving testimony to the reality of his resurrection. We have seen, in the course of the preceding section, that, from the nature of the case, these men could not be deceived ; and, if we can with equal safety acquit them of any intention to deceive others, their testimony ought to be sustained.

The general character of the Apostles gives us no particular cause for doubting the truth of their testimony ; for, with the exception of a persevering endeavour to propagate their Master's doctrine, it does not appear that any particular blame was ever imputed to them. But, supposing that they were in their hearts dishonest, and willing to deceive others, with a view to some personal advantage, we cannot suppose that they made an attempt to do so, without some hope of success ; for, without more or less hope of success, no scheme of deception was ever followed out.—If they knew assuredly that their Master, after working many miracles, had risen from the dead, they might certainly feel it to be their duty, without any consideration of the consequences, to declare the truth as they were commanded by him, and leave the event to that Being whose power they knew to be equal to all things ; but it is morally

impossible that they should have undertaken a work of deception, without looking forward to some chance of succeeding, by the means in their own power. What, then, were the means and endeavours by which they could, in this case, expect to deceive the world?

They must have been aware that they had not such education and learning as could eminently qualify them for deceiving men of enlightened minds; nor was it possible that they could expect to accomplish much by their power and influence. By nature they were not even endowed with that courage, which could either qualify them for, or excite them to, a very dangerous undertaking;—in an hour of danger, they had all very recently deserted their Master. They had, besides, too much cause to distrust one another; for one of their number, in whose fidelity they had implicitly confided, had, but very lately, betrayed their common Lord.

With such personal disqualifications, of which they must have been conscious, could they derive more encouragement from the nature of their supposed undertaking—from any facilities for deception, which the undertaking itself could afford?

The self-denying doctrine, which they were to

preach, was not likely to prepossess the world in their favour. They knew that it had already incensed, not the rulers only, but the great body of the Jewish nation, against Christ himself and his cause; and they had seen, from their Master's death, with what vigour and determination the power and authority of their adversaries were likely to be employed against them. Nor was it in their own country alone that they had cause to expect such determined resistance;—they were to preach, to many nations, a doctrine which denounced every other system of faith and worship, as not only vain but impious,—a doctrine, therefore, which could not be otherwise accepted by any people, than at the expense of abolishing the established religion of their country.

Shall it, indeed, be supposed that, by such men, and in such circumstances, a scheme would be devised for imposing upon others such pretended miracles as were to overthrow the religious faith and religious establishments of the civilized world? I put this question, even upon the supposition already stated—that the men themselves were to be gainers by the deception; for, even upon this supposition, I hold it to have been morally impossible that, conscious of the fraud, and consequently without any other reliance than upon their own

resources, they should have devoted themselves to such an undertaking,—an undertaking utterly without hope.

But in what respect were the Apostles to be gainers by bearing a false testimony to the miracles of Christ? Much of the argument by which I have endeavoured to show, in a preceding chapter, that the authors of the Gospel history could have no motive to impose on the world a false or fictitious narrative, is equally applicable to the testimony which the Apostles bore to their Master's miracles. The belief of pretended miracles was to establish, for his doctrine, a false claim to faith and acceptance. But how, or in what way, was that doctrine to profit the men who preached it? It was to *worldly* profit alone that they could look as the reward of *falsehood*;—In what way, then, was the preaching of their Master's doctrine to serve to them any *worldly* purpose? The self-denial, which they undertook to inculcate upon others, and consequently were bound to exemplify in their own conduct, seemed to place worldly advantages out of question. Nor was it possible that they should not have foreseen, from the beginning, that something very opposite to the gain of this world would infallibly be the fruit of their labour. All the circumstances to which I have

adverted, as precluding a rational hope of success, must have led them to anticipate—not resistance merely—but hardship and suffering, at the hand of men who were deeply interested to counteract their efforts. Their Master, indeed, had warned them that they should be hated and persecuted for his sake; and their own experience must have gradually confirmed every apprehension of suffering, which, from the beginning, they had cause to entertain. We are assured that, in the course of their apostolic labour, they all endured great persecution; and that the greater part, at least, of their number, even suffered a violent death, as martyrs to the truth of what they had attested.

If this fact be admitted, it must lead to an important conclusion; yet upon what ground can the fact be called in question?

That the early Christians were persecuted on account of their religion, and that many of them, who refused to renounce the Christian faith, were on that account put to death, seems to be altogether undeniable. In addition to what the authors of the New Testament communicate to us on this subject, we are furnished with a minute detail of corresponding facts, by a variety of Heathen writers, whose veracity has never been impeached. I have already quoted, (though for another pur-

pose) such an account of the sufferings of the early Christians, from the writings of Tacitus and Suetonius, as may well supersede the necessity of producing farther testimony. Shall it then be supposed that the Apostles of Christ, through whose word others believed, were themselves exempted from the persecution to which their converts were exposed? Were this a supposable case, it could not be difficult to prove the reverse of the proposition. The early sufferings of some of the Apostles—including the martyrdom of James the Elder—as detailed in the book entitled *The Acts of the Apostles*, proved to be no more than a specimen of what their brethren were destined to endure, as represented in the writings of many of the fathers of the Christian Church, whose testimony on the subject has come down to us uncontradicted. But, in reference to a point, which so little admits of question, I cannot think it necessary to enter into detail; and I decline to do so with more freedom, because I can safely refer any reader, who may be desirous of more particular information, to a satisfactory disquisition on the subject, in the first volume of Dr Paley's *View of the Evidences of Christianity*.

What conclusion are we to derive from such premises?—The Apostles of Christ bore testimony

to the reality of his miracles, and more particularly to the fact that he had risen from the state of the dead. They preached "Jesus of Nazareth as a man approved of God by miracles, and wonders, and signs;" they preached his doctrine as the word of God,—because proceeding from one who had, by miracles, attested his divine mission. Their means of knowledge respecting these alleged miracles, were such as precluded the possibility of their being deceived;—and, for the purpose of convincing the world of their sincerity, they were willing to submit to any trial of it, that suspicion and malice could suggest. After enduring much in their Master's cause, they were individually, and in succession, threatened with death, as the punishment of their adherence to it. They knew this to be no vain threat; for they had seen it executed upon other Christians who were less deeply implicated in the alleged offence. They, at the same time, knew, that the means of escape were in their power. They had only to retract their confession of Christ and his doctrine, in order to ensure their deliverance at the latest hour. Yet they, one after another, preferred to lay down their lives as martyrs to the truth of what they had attested.

In what possible way could men afford more

evidence of their truth and integrity? To part with life itself for the purpose of confirming his testimony, is the utmost that we can demand of any man. It is, therefore, a test of sincerity which the world has not been, in other cases, disposed to reject. But, in no other case, has there been such strong ground for sustaining it; for, while the Apostles of Christ were willing to submit to death rather than relinquish their Master's cause, their conduct, from the beginning, in maintaining that cause, is altogether incapable of being accounted for, upon any principle, by which we can suppose a dishonest and worldly mind to be actuated. The fair conclusion, therefore, is, that either their testimony ought to be sustained, or there ought to be an end to belief founded upon testimony.

SECTION V.

BESIDES THE MIRACLES WROUGHT BY CHRIST HIMSELF, THERE APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN MANY MIRACLES WROUGHT BY THE APOSTLES AND OTHER EARLY TEACHERS OF CHRISTIANITY, FOR THE REALITY OF WHICH WE HAVE EVIDENCE ARISING FROM TACIT ADMISSION, THAT MAY PROVE, TO SOME MINDS, EVEN MORE SATISFACTORY THAN DIRECT AND POSITIVE PROOF.

I THOUGHT it necessary to prove the truth of the Gospel history, so far as the facts which it contains are not miraculous, before I reasoned from these facts in support of the truth of Christ's miracles. But what we know of the miracles, to which I now refer, is derived, not from the Gospel history, but chiefly from the Epistles of Paul. The reader may therefore ask, as a preliminary question, what evidence we have for the authenticity of these Epistles.

In replying, however, to this question, it will not, I think, be necessary to subject any reader to the labour which would attend a renewed examination of the fathers of the Christian church, for the purpose of extracting from them what re-

fers to the writings of Paul. For, in the first place, the Gospel history, which we have already seen to be authentic, affords presumptive evidence of the authenticity of all the Apostolic Epistles. What they contain is in strict accordance with it;—many of the facts, to which Paul alludes in his Epistles, are recorded in the Gospel history;—and the whole doctrine, which we find inculcated, as well as the whole object proposed, in the epistolary writings of the New Testament, are exactly the same with those of the Gospels.—In the second place, it will not be found necessary to my present purpose to prove any thing farther respecting the Epistles in question, than that they were actually transmitted to those Christian churches, for whose use they profess to have been written.—And, in the third place, this point appears to be sufficiently established by what I have already had occasion to quote from the writings of the fathers of the church, when proving the truth of the Gospel history. Much of the evidence which I extracted from their writings is applicable, not to the Gospels alone, but equally to the Epistles, and leaves us in no doubt about the existence and publication of both at a very early period. We have seen that *Polycarp* speaks of the writings of inspired men as, even in his time, collected in one sacred volume, which, in

one passage, he denominates “ the Oracles of the Lord ;” and, in another, “ the Holy Scriptures ;” we have also seen that *Origen* makes quotations from nearly all the books which compose the volume of the New Testament,—and that *Clement*, a much earlier writer, not only makes reference to one of the Epistles of Paul, but explicitly mentions its author by name.

Now, in that very Epistle, to which *Clement* refers, (the first to the Corinthians,) Paul gave an account of the various gifts of the Spirit, by which he and other early teachers of Christianity had been qualified for their office, and had gained converts to the Christian faith, in Corinth as well as other cities. Among these, he enumerated the gifts of healing and working miracles ; and he accordingly reminded the Corinthians, in his second Epistle, “ that the signs of an Apostle had been wrought among them, in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds.”* He again referred, in his Epistle to the Galatians, to the miracles which had been wrought by those who ministered to them in the spirit ;—and, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, we find distinct mention made of “ signs and wonders, and divers miracles,” by which God had borne wit-

ness to the Apostles, for confirming the faith of those to whom they preached.

I admit that we have no such record of the miracles to which I now refer, as can even enable us to distinguish one of them from another. We cannot, therefore, have the advantage of examining their circumstances, for the purpose of ascertaining the credit which is due to them. We have not even the benefit of any direct testimony to their reality, proceeding from men who beheld them. Yet the single and unencumbered fact—that the Apostle Paul, in his letters to different churches, referred to such miracles, as having been actually wrought among themselves, affords a proof of these miracles, which, morally speaking, I would pronounce irresistible.

Paul must certainly have known whether he had himself wrought such miracles. But, not only was it impossible that he should himself be deceived, it seems to have been out of his power, in this case, to deceive those to whom he wrote ; for they also must have had some knowledge whether miracles had or had not been wrought among them. It was, therefore, impossible that any man of common sense could deliberately refer to such miracles, in the language used by the Apostle, without a certainty in his own mind that they

were a matter of notoriety among those whom he addressed. If, among the Corinthians and others, no such miracles had been known, the solemn appeal which Paul made to them, in support of his doctrine, must have been regarded as an insult, and his doctrine must, in consequence, have been rejected as an imposture. But the men to whom he wrote, did, on the contrary, receive and acknowledge his Epistles as containing nothing else than the words of Divine truth, and thereby set their own seal to the truth of the Apostle's assertion respecting the miracles to which I now refer.

The importance of this part of the argument is so well illustrated by *Dr Chalmers*, that I am confident the reader will thank me for the following quotation :—

“ There are infidels who have affirmed that the glory of establishing a new religion, induced the first Christians to assert, and to persist in asserting, what they knew to be a falsehood. But they forget that we have the concurrence of two parties to the truth of Christianity, and that it is the conduct only of one of the parties, which can be accounted for by the supposition in question. The two parties are the teachers and the taught. The former may aspire to the glory of founding a new faith ; but what glory did the latter propose to

themselves from being the dupes of an imposition so ruinous to every earthly interest, and held in such low and disgraceful estimation by the world at large ? Abandon the teachers of Christianity to every imputation which infidelity, on the rack for conjectures to give plausibility to its system, can desire, how shall we explain the concurrence of its disciples ? There may be a glory in leading, but we see no glory in being led. - - - Paul, in his Epistles to the Corinthians, tells them that some of them had the gift of healing, and the power of working miracles ; and that the signs of an apostle had been wrought among them in wonders and mighty deeds. A man aspiring to the glory of an accredited teacher would never have committed himself on a subject, where his falsehood could have been so readily exposed. And in the veneration with which we know his Epistles to have been preserved by the Church of Corinth, we have not merely the testimony of their writer to the truth of the Christian miracles, but the testimony of a whole people, who had no interest in being deceived. - - - How comes it, if it be all a fabrication, that it was never exposed ? We know that some of the disciples were driven, by the terrors of persecuting violence, to resign their profession. How should it happen that none of them ever at-

tempted to vindicate their apostasy, by laying open the artifice and insincerity of their Christian teachers? We may be sure that such a testimony would have been highly acceptable to the existing authorities of that period. The Jews would have made the most of it; and the vigilant and discerning officers of the Roman government would not have failed to turn it to account.”*

Upon my own mind, this particular argument makes the more impression, because I hold it to be not only unlikely, but almost incredible, that the circumstances in which it is founded should have been devised by the wisdom of man for the accomplishment of the purpose which is actually served by it.—It seems to me almost impossible that Paul, when he reminded the Corinthians and others of the miracles which had been wrought among them, could have any farther object than that of strengthening and establishing the faith of the individuals to whom he wrote;—It seems almost impossible that he could, at the time, be actuated by any view to that ultimate evidence for the reality of these miracles, which would result from the confidence with which he had appealed to them, in writing to men to whom the truth of

* The Evidence, &c. edit. 1816. pp. 98—100.

the case must have been known. It seems rather, that in this case,—as we may well suppose in many others,—the thoughts and purposes of the Apostle must have been overruled by God, for the accomplishment of an object, which he had not himself contemplated,—and that in this way a foundation has been laid for such an accession to the evidence of Christian miracles, and consequently to the evidences of the Christian revelation, as will not, I think, be made light of by any candid and intelligent mind.

I am not forgetting, that in the case of the miracles to which I have now referred, we are altogether without those advantages which enabled us to ascertain that they who beheld the miracles of Christ could not themselves be deceived. The utmost evidence we have for the miracles now in question is, that the men among whom they were wrought, conscientiously believed in their reality. But, considering what appears to have been the number and variety of these miracles,—considering also the number of churches or societies of Christians among which they were wrought, and by none of which their reality was disavowed,—considering, at the same time, that a detection of imposture, even in one case out of a hundred, must have brought ultimate discredit on the

whole,—the argument founded on them cannot fail, I think, to afford a delightful and satisfying corroboration of the evidence previously stated, as resulting from the miracles which were wrought by Christ himself during his own abode upon earth.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE GOSPEL IS ALSO SUPPORTED BY EVIDENCE ARISING FROM THE FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY.

IF all the other evidences of Christianity were annihilated, or kept out of view, we have such evidence resulting from a long continued and progressive fulfilment of prophecy as might of itself convince and satisfy any candid mind. But, in order to our deriving more full satisfaction from an examination of those prophecies, in detail, which relate to Christ and his religion, there are some general observations which I desire very shortly to premise.

SECTION I.

PROPHECY, IN CONNEXION WITH ITS FULFILMENT, IS WELL CALCULATED TO AFFORD EVIDENCE OF A DIVINE INTERPOSITION, AND EVIDENCE WHICH WE OUGHT NOT TO CONSIDER AS WEAKENED BY A CERTAIN MEASURE OF OBSCURITY IN THE PROPHETIC RECORD.

IT will not be denied that future events may be

so distant, and dependent on so many circumstances, as to render it impossible for human sagacity to foresee their accomplishment ;—In the view of human wisdom, they may be so improbable as even to forbid any conjecture of their fulfilment. Consequently, to foretell such events is just as much a miracle of knowledge as any mighty work can be a miracle of power.

Prophecy, considered in connexion with its fulfilment, has even some advantages over miracles of power.

The man, to whom the evidence of prophecy is presented, can examine and contemplate, both long and deliberately, all the circumstances with which any particular case is connected ;—to the time allowed him for this examination there is no other limit set than his continuance in the present state of trial and discipline. There is no room left for the pretence—sometimes urged in the case of what we more commonly denominate miracles—that even an eye-witness may be deceived by false and momentary appearances. Nor does it seem that, in regard to any particular prophecy, a later age can be much in want of any advantage for the requisite examination, that was enjoyed by the men in whose time it was fulfilled. The infidel who

pleads, in justification of his unbelief, that he would have believed in Christ if he had seen the miracles which are ascribed to him, can offer no corresponding vindication of himself for resisting that evidence which results from the fulfilment of prophecy, in the appearance and work of Christ upon earth. For, even at the present day, we have very nearly, if not altogether, the same advantage that was enjoyed by any who have gone before us, for deliberately judging and ascertaining whether those events, which the prophets foretold, could be foreseen or anticipated by human sagacity, and whether the things foretold have been in their time and order fulfilled.

When a variety of prophecies have one common object, the evidence arising from their fulfilment may also be found progressive in its influence. If, in reference to salvation through Christ, and the fortunes of his Church in the world, there has been a long succession of prophecies gradually receiving their fulfilment,—throughout many ages and down to the present day,—there can be no doubt that the mere accumulation of cases must render the evidence of his Divine mission stronger to *us* than it was to men of an earlier age. But it is more important to remark, that a combination of cases, in regular succession, may also reflect such light

on one another as to strengthen materially the evidence resulting from each. Miracles of power do not derive the same advantage from being viewed in connexion. Though their number may strengthen our general security against deception, by affording us renewed opportunity of detecting imposture, each must be separately considered, and its reality separately ascertained. But the language of one prophecy may go far to illustrate that of another, with reference to the same common object ; and, when we examine the circumstances of their fulfilment, any difficulty which we find in the case of one may be, in a great measure, removed by corresponding circumstances of another. Supposing that the figurative language of a particular prophecy would of itself leave us in doubt whether it refer to a temporal or a spiritual concern,—if it be obvious, from the distinguishing circumstances of another prophecy, that the same words can be there interpreted only in a spiritual sense, the latter case may certainly aid us towards a just interpretation of the former. In short, every step which we take, with sufficient caution, in our examination and judgment of prophecies in detail, so far as they have reference to the same general object, goes far, both to facilitate our progress, and to secure us, as we proceed, against the hazard of deception. An accumulation of cases serves, in

this way, to strengthen the evidence which results to us from each ;—and, to the man who is unwearyed in his search after truth, an historical review of all those prophecies which bear on the advent and work of the Messiah, and the fortunes of his Church in the world, may probably be found the most effectual mean, which he can employ, for the establishment of his mind in the faith of the Gospel.

There has been much complaint about the *obscurity* of prophecy. But the absurdity of the complaint has been so often exposed, and is so palpable to the reflecting mind, that it cannot be necessary to say much respecting it. The language of prophecy might be so clear and unambiguous as altogether to defeat its own object. Were it as explicit as seems to be demanded, any individual, placed in favourable circumstances for the purpose, would have it in his power so to conform his own pretensions, as well as his own appearance and manner of life, to what had been foretold, as to impose himself on the world for the person actually designed in the language of the prophet ;—Or, if no such deceitful attempt were made, still the person designed would, in a great measure, lose the advantage which the fulfilment of prophecy was intended to afford him ; for it would be urged,

with too much seeming reason, that the prophetic language had put it in his own power to bring about its fulfilment in the way best calculated to accomplish his object. It was therefore wisely ordered that the prophecies concerning the Messiah should be involved in as much obscurity as to leave no ground for this objection. Yet we shall find, on the other hand, that the circumstances connected with their fulfilment reflect such light on the prophetic language, as may now satisfy every candid mind respecting its original import.

It is, besides, to be considered that, if the language of the prophets respecting the advent and the character of the Messiah had been so explicit as to make it impossible for any one to misconstrue or misapply it, we can scarcely suppose that the Jews would have put him to death, without their minds being so overruled of God as to deprive them of their free agency. The operation and effect, therefore, of such prophecies might, for aught we know, be incompatible with the condition of men as accountable creatures. It is only from such a degree of obscurity in the prophetic language as its fulfilment effectually removes, that we have assurance of its being a fit instrument in the hands of an All-wise Being for the accomplishment of his gracious purposes.

The force of this reasoning will be more mani-

fest when we attend to some of the prophecies in detail. But, in this case as in others, it is essential to be assured, in the first place, that we derive our information from an authentic record.

SECTION II.

THERE IS NO GOOD GROUND FOR OBJECTING TO THE OLD TESTAMENT AS A RECORD OF PROPHECIES.

PERHAPS I ought not even to anticipate any such objection ; for it will not be found that my argument rests on an admission of the Divine inspiration of the Old Testament. The prophecies in question are contained in a certain book, or collection of books, which assign to themselves a very early date, or a variety of very early dates. If it shall be found that these alleged prophecies have been manifestly fulfilled in later ages, their fulfilment may, no doubt, tend to prove the Divine inspiration of the books in which they are contained ; but a previous assumption or admission of such inspiration, cannot be necessary to my present purpose. In order to our reasoning, with the desired effect, from the alleged fulfilment of such prophecies, all that can be requisite is, that we be duly assured of the early existence of the record in which they are contained. Were it to be held

that the record in question, so far from having existed at a very early period, may be reasonably supposed to be a fabrication by the friends of the Christian cause, subsequently to the events of which it professes to afford a prophetic intimation, this would, indeed, be fatal to our argument. But the antiquity of the Hebrew scriptures appears to be so generally admitted, and I am so little aware of any ground on which it can be questioned, that what I think it necessary to advance on this preliminary point, may be comprised within very narrow bounds.

1. It is impossible to suppose that any of those Jews who, since the coming of Christ, have adhered to the institutions of Moses, should have combined with Christians for imposing on the world, as an ancient record, any books of modern invention, which tend to establish the Christian faith ;—yet, without their co-operation, it is obvious that such a fraud could not be practised.

2. We have evidence of the early existence of the Hebrew scriptures, arising from a translation of them into the Greek language ;—for, though there may be some fiction in the accounts which are given of the way in which that translation was executed, there seems to be no doubt that

the first part of it, at least, was completed more than 150 years before the birth of Christ. Nor would it be easy to account for the labour bestowed in the execution of that work, without admitting that the Hebrew scriptures must have been, at the time, regarded as a record valuable on account of its antiquity.

3. The evidence which we have already sustained, for the truth of the Gospel history, makes it impossible for us to doubt that the Old Testament Scriptures were in the hands of the Jews, long before Christ appeared in the world; for we find that the Evangelists make frequent reference to these Scriptures, as the well-known and long-established foundation of the religion of their country. They make frequent reference to Moses, in particular, and the law of God as contained in his writings,—by which they must certainly be understood as bearing testimony—if not to the truth of all that is contained in the books of Moses—at least to their having been handed down, as a record believed to be genuine, from the early period at which it professes to have been written.

4. The antiquity of the Jewish race, and of the Scriptures which attest it, casts light on much that is peculiar in the existing character and

habits of that people ; and the existence of such a people, bears testimony to that historical record, which alone enables us to account for what we observe in their condition.

What, then, are the prophecies which have been most remarkably fulfilled, either in the appearance and the work of Christ upon earth, or in the subsequent fortunes, both of his Church, and of the Jewish nation ?—An answer to this question will be the business of the three following Sections.

SECTION III.

INTIMATIONS WERE VERY EARLY GIVEN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, OF A DIVINE PURPOSE TO EMPLOY SOME EXTRAORDINARY AND EFFECTUAL MEANS FOR THE DELIVERANCE OF MEN FROM THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR TRANSGRESSION AND FALL, AND FOR THE PREVALENCE OF TRUE RELIGION AMONG ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH.

THE original intimation, that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent,* though in some respects very enigmatical, was obviously of precious import ; and the promise of a blessed deliverance was renewed to Abraham, as the father of the faithful, in language more explicit.

When Abraham was called to leave his country and his kindred, and to go forth in quest of another land, God was pleased to enter into a covenant with him, saying—" I will make of thee

* Gen. chap. iii. ver. 15.

a great nation, - - - And in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”* To this covenant the Lord is also represented as referring, when he was about to destroy the city of Sodom ; “ Shall I hide,” said He, “ from Abraham that thing which I do ; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him ?”†—And to give greater solemnity to this covenant, the promise or engagement on the part of God was explicitly renewed, when Abraham had approved himself faithful to his promise of obedience, by consenting to the sacrifice of his son Isaac :—“ By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son ; That in blessing, I will bless thee, and in multiplying, I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, - - - And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”‡

The first part of this promise was strictly accomplished. Not to speak of other descendants of Abraham, the progeny of his grandson Jacob became, of themselves, a great nation. Shall it, in these circumstances, be supposed that the other part of the promise has failed, or that there is no

* Gen. chap. xii. ver. 2, 3. † Gen. chap. xviii. ver. 17, 18.

‡ Gen. chap. xxii. ver. 16—18.

sense in which all the families or nations of the earth either have been, or ever shall be, blessed in the seed of Abraham?—One of his descendants, the Apostle Peter, maintained to his brethren the Jews, that the advent of the Messiah and the preaching of his Gospel, were a fulfilment of this promise—of “the covenant,” said he, “which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham—In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.”* And Paul, in addressing himself to Gentile Christians, represents even them as, in a spiritual sense, the children of Abraham, because “the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying—In thee shall all nations be blessed.”†

Is there any good reason for rejecting this interpretation of the Divine promise?—Regarding Christ, as in his human nature one of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, and regarding the religion which he taught as both designed for the benefit of all nations, and comprehending a pledge or promise of its being ultimately received by every nation under Heaven,—Upon what ground can it be denied, either that the Christian dispensation is a fulfilment of the Divine promise

* Acts, chap. iii. ver. 25. † Gal. chap. iii. ver. 8.

to Abraham, or that the promise so early given, when considered in connexion with its fulfilment, affords corroborative evidence that the Christian religion is of God?

Shall it be regarded as an objection to this argument, that I interpret the divine promise as referring to a *spiritual* blessing?

The words, in which the promise is expressed, do not enable us to determine whether the blessing to all nations was to be temporal or spiritual. Consequently, all that is necessary to the vindication and fulfilment of the promise is, that the blessing, as realized, appear to be of adequate importance; and it will not be denied, that such spiritual blessings as the Gospel of Christ offers to all men, (if they have indeed a substance and reality,) are more important than all that this world can give.

But, in looking forward to other promises of the Old Testament, obviously connected with that which was given to Abraham, we shall find decisive evidence, both that the blessing in question was altogether spiritual, and that these promises have been literally accomplished in Christ as a spiritual Saviour.

The *typical* prophecies are, from the nature of

the case, more ambiguous than others ; yet I feel that I should not do justice to my argument by keeping them altogether out of view ; for the language employed is, in some cases, incapable of being accounted for, on any other supposition than that of its referring to the Messiah and his spiritual kingdom.

It is well known that, under the Old Testament dispensation, not only was instruction conveyed by figurative or symbolical actions, but some person already existing in the world was occasionally pointed out as an emblem and representative of one who should afterwards appear. To the person so pointed out, regarded as a type, the Old Testament writers even applied all the distinguishing characteristics of the antitype, or the person figuratively predicted, so as to speak, in all respects, of him who should at length appear, under the name and designation of his existing representative.

David, King of Israel, was accordingly a type of Christ. We find that, in the book of Psalms, he frequently speaks of himself in that character, and in such language as it is impossible to apply to himself literally. “ I will declare the decree,” saith he ; “ The Lord hath said unto me, Thou

art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the Heathen for thine inheritance; and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession.”*—That the person, here referred to, is represented as the Son of God in a peculiar and exalted sense, is evident, not only from the language in which that relation is expressed, but also from the inheritance assigned to him. It will not be said that David himself received any such inheritance; nor is there any other person than the Messiah to whom the typical representation can be held as applicable. But Christ is elsewhere revealed as the *only begotten* of the Father; and of the glorious inheritance here promised, considered in a spiritual view, we know that he has, in a great measure, received “possession”—possession of it in such a degree as constitutes a satisfying earnest of its being in its full extent realized to him.

In a prayer for his son Solomon, David speaks of *him* also as a type of the Messiah. After much that may be regarded as *partly* applicable to the temporal kingdom over which Solomon was to reign, and, *in all respects*, applicable to the spiritual kingdom of Christ, the Psalmist breaks out in loftier strains respecting the person of whom he

* Psalm ii. ver. 7, 8.

chiefly spoke. "All kings," says he, "shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him; - - - His name shall endure for ever; his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed."*—David could not be ignorant that what he thus foretold was not to be accomplished in the person of Solomon himself as an earthly prince;—his eye was evidently directed to the promise which had been made to Abraham and his seed, as at length to be fulfilled in one who should be descended of Solomon.

But, in the writings of the Prophet Isaiah, there are numerous representations of the Messiah's kingdom divested of all the ambiguity of *typical* prophecy; and we shall find that, though partly veiled under figures and images of a temporal kind, they have obviously a spiritual reference.

The nations are spoken of as involved in darkness; and God is represented as saying to the promised deliverer—"It is a light thing," (a small matter,) "that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayst be my salvation

* Psalm lxxii. ver. 11, 17.

unto the ends of the earth.”* And again, addressing himself to the Jewish nation, the Lord is represented as saying—“ Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee ; for, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people ; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee ; and the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.”†

It will scarcely be denied that the prophet here refers to a spiritual blessing ; for it is of such blessings that *light* is ordinarily employed as an emblem. Nor can any thing appear more natural than the application which the aged Simeon made of this prophecy, when he took the child Jesus “ in his arms, and blessed God, and said—Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word ; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people ; *a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.*”‡

The prophet, indeed, had intimated more particularly that the light which was to shine upon the Gentiles should have the blessed effect of turning them from idolatry. “ They shall be turned

* Isaiah, chap. xlix. ver. 6. † Ibid. chap. lx. ver. 1—3.

‡ Luke, chap. ii. ver. 28—32.

back," said he, "they shall be greatly ashamed that trust in graven images, that say to the molten images—Ye are our Gods."* And we accordingly know, that wherever the light of the Gospel has penetrated, its immediate effect has been to put an end to all *acknowledged* worship of idols.

By another prophet it was distinctly intimated, that the great purpose, for which the promised Deliverer should be revealed, was "to make an end of sin, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness."† And the Gospel accordingly instructs us that, while Christ hath made atonement for iniquity, the grace of God has been revealed by him, for the purpose of teaching all men to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."‡

It is manifest, even from these quotations, but still more from the general tenour of the Old Testament Scriptures, that, long before the advent of Christ, intimations had been given of a gracious purpose, on the part of God, at length to employ some extraordinary and powerful means for the preva-

* Isaiah, chap. xlii. ver. 17.

† Daniel, chap. ix. ver. 24.

‡ Tit. chap. ii. ver. 12.

lence of true religion among all nations. At the time when these intimations had been given and recorded, there was nothing in the condition of the Heathen world, or in the outward course of events connected with it, that could justify any corresponding expectation. Yet the Gospel of Christ, and the means employed for its establishment and propagation, may well be regarded as a fulfilment of what had been thus foretold, and as a strong pledge of the ultimate and complete fulfilment of the promise originally made to Abraham—That, in his seed, all the nations of the earth should be blessed.

It is not, however, to the general import only of the promised blessing, that the prophecies of the Old Testament refer ;—they direct our attention, more particularly, to the character and work of the promised Deliverer, and even to the time which had been fixed and determined for his appearance.

SECTION IV.

PROPHETIC NOTICES WERE GIVEN OF THE CHARACTER AND CONDITION OF THE PERSON BY WHOM THE PROMISED BLESSING SHOULD BE IMPARTED TO THE WORLD,—OF HIS PECULIAR WORK AS A SAVIOUR,—AND EVEN OF THE TIME WHEN HE SHOULD BE MANIFESTED.

RESPECTING the *Divine* character of the promised Messiah, we find David employing very explicit language. “Thou art fairer,” says he, “than the children of men. - - - Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever ; the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre ; thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness ; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”* It is obvious, that the name or title of *God* is, in this passage, given to more than one person. It is first given to the person immediately addressed, and then to another, who is distinguished as *his* God, or the Being who has anointed him with the oil of gladness. Considered in this view, the language denotes both the *divine* character of the promised Deliverer, and that

* Psalm xlv. ver. 2, 6, 7.

subordination to his heavenly Father which Christians recognise in the Saviour as a man, or one of the seed of Abraham.

But, if there seem to be in this case any obscurity, only let one passage of Scripture (in words of the same author) illustrate the import of another. “The Lord,” says David, in another Psalm,—“The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”* Any ambiguity which we might otherwise find in the import of these words, is removed by an unanswerable argument with which we are furnished by Christ himself. “What think ye of Christ?” said he to the Pharisees, “Whose son is he? They say unto him, the son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying—The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word.”† The question admitted of no answer without recognising—what Christians know and believe concerning the person of the Saviour—that while, as a man, he is of the seed of Abraham, and the son of David, he is also the eternal and only begotten son of God, and in that

* Psalm cx. ver. 1.

† Matth. chap. xxii. ver. 42—46.

respect, the Lord of David.—It is accordingly this consideration and no other—a consideration of his character as both the son of God and the son of man, which also enables us to account for the words addressed to him,—“ Sit thou at my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.” It is in his character as man and Mediator that he is thus exalted, and that his enemies are brought under subjection to him. Yet it is in virtue of the union of the Divine to the human nature in his person, that he is *qualified* to be the head of his spiritual kingdom on earth, and to direct and govern all things for the good of his church.

The prophet Isaiah, also, while he speaks of the Messiah as a child who should be born in the world, does yet denominate him “ the mighty God ;” * and, for the purpose of denoting his peculiar and distinguishing character in a way which could neither be misinterpreted, nor fail to command attention, the prophet explicitly refers to his miraculous conception ;—“ Behold a *virgin* shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” †—While, in these words, the human nature of the Messiah is unequivocally

* Isaiah, chap. ix. ver. 6. † Isaiab, chap. vii, ver. 14.

denoted—while he is represented as descending from an earthly parent, the designation or condition of his mother so distinguishes his case from that of other men, as to constitute a striking emblem of his character as a man without sin. Nor does the prophet fail to keep his divine nature at the same time in view. His name was to be *Immanuel*, which, in the Hebrew language, signifies—*God with us*—God manifested in the flesh, and, for a time, dwelling with men upon earth.

These are, to say the least, very striking predictions, and incapable of being applied to any other individual than that Saviour, in whose character, as the New Testament reveals it, they have received exact and perfect fulfilment. But not only did the language of prophecy direct attention, as we have seen, to the peculiar character of the promised Messiah as both God and man,—the prophet, whose words I have last quoted, gave an account, also, of his outward condition in the world, and of the means by which he should accomplish his work upon earth,—an account which it seems so impossible to misinterpret or misapply, that, though all other evidence from prophecy were out of view, it might of itself be sufficient to satisfy the candid mind.

The prophet represents him as one who does

“no violence, neither is deceit in his mouth—yet despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with griefs.” This unmerited affliction he bears without murmur or complaint; for, “as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.—Yet it pleases the Lord to bruise him, and put him to grief,”—not, indeed, on his own account, but he is “wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace is upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. - - - The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all,” - - - and, as a “righteous servant, he shall justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities.”*

To whom, or what sort of person, shall this language be found applicable? Is there any thing farther in the prophet's account that can help us to interpret it as applicable to any ordinary man? It will rather be admitted that what remains of the description is more extraordinary. For, while the person in question is “numbered with transgressors, and pours out his soul unto death,” thereby making himself “an offering for sin,” we are assured that “he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands.”†

The prophet obviously refers to one who, after

* Isaiah, chap. liii. † Ver. 10.

submitting to death, should rise superior to its power ; and the whole description of his character,—of his suffering,—of the reason and purpose of his suffering—not on his own account, but for others,—and of his glory also as the reward of his suffering,—The whole is so strictly conformable to what has been realized in the person and the work of Christ, that—were there not incontrovertible evidence of the authenticity of the prediction—it would most probably be represented as an attempt to pass under the name, and to clothe with the character, of prophecy, what had been written after the events in question were accomplished,

It is, therefore, most satisfactory to know, that our evidence of the authenticity of this prophecy, and particularly of the time when it was written and recorded, is the most perfect that can be desired. The date which the Old Testament Scriptures assign to it is more than seven hundred years before the Son of God was manifested in the flesh ; and I have already referred to satisfying evidence of the existence of the Old Testament record, as the well-known and established foundation of the Jewish faith, long before the Gospel of Christ was preached to the world. But, with reference to a prophecy of such high importance as that now in question, I may be excused, I hope, for also reminding

my reader of the impossibility that, from the birth of Christ to the present time, there can have been any interpolation of the language, which I have quoted. Let it only be remembered that, during all that time, the canon of Old Testament Scripture has been in the keeping of a people, who abhor the Christian name, and who, notwithstanding, read at the present day, as the words of Isaiah, what I have now transcribed from his writings. The unbelief of the Jews appears, in this view, to have been overruled by God for the establishment of the very faith which they have disdained and rejected.

The Divine Being often accomplishes his purposes by means which our imagination could never have anticipated; but while, in the present instance, we trace the design of Heaven to place the authenticity of such predictions out of question, it will not fail, I trust, to have the effect of disposing every candid mind more duly to yield to the force of evidence. Nor will it be found that there is any lack of such additional evidence from prophecy as can be, with reason, either expected or desired.

Besides developing, as we have seen, both the character and the work of the promised Messiah, the Old Testament Scriptures referred, from the

beginning, to the *time* when he should appear in the world.

When Jacob, on his death-bed, foretold to each of his sons what should be his own fortune and that of his posterity, he adverted more particularly to the fortune of Judah. After representing his pre-eminence over his brethren, and comparing his strength or power to that of a lion,—the Patriarch added these remarkable words :—“ The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come ; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” *

Without troubling my reader with the more critical and learned argument for proving that the name *Shiloh* is, in its import, exclusively appropriate to the promised Messiah,—it may be sufficient to advert to the language of Jacob in this passage, as connected with the promise which had been made to Abraham. The promise bore, in the first place, that the seed of Abraham should become a great nation ; and, in the second place, that, in his seed, or in one descended of him, all the nations of the earth should be blessed. Accord-

* Gen. chap. xlix. ver. 10.

ingly, Jacob here refers to both parts of the original promise, and intimates that both should receive their accomplishment in the tribe of Judah. The dominion which Judah should exercise is intimated by the *sceptre* which he should wield, and by his denomination and character as a *lawgiver*. The long continuance also of this dominion is adverted to, and yet limits are set to its duration ;—It is, in some sense, to cease when Shiloh comes. Yet, in another sense, it is then to become more extensive ; for, unto Shiloh the people or nations of the earth are to be gathered—and gathered, I may fairly add, for the ultimate fulfilment of the second part of the original promise,—that, in one descended of Abraham, all nations should be blessed.

Considered in this connexion, the language of Jacob plainly intimates, that the coming of the Messiah was to precede the destruction of Jerusalem ; yet it implies, at the same time, that the two were to be nearly contemporary events ;—and it will not be denied, that in both these respects, the prophecy corresponds to what we historically know concerning the birth of Christ, and the subsequent overthrow of the Jewish polity and commonwealth.

But the time which had been fixed, in the counsels of Heaven, for the advent of the Messiah, was

revealed at a later period, in a way more definite and unequivocal. About 500 years before the birth of Christ, the Prophet Daniel disclosed the import of a very precise communication on this subject, which had been made to him by the Angel Gabriel. One circumstance only in that communication will be found at all enigmatical ; and I have the satisfaction of premising, that the question which it involves will prove to be one of easy solution.

The law of Moses prescribed to the Jews a peculiar way of computing time, with reference to what was denominated the *Jubilee*. "The seventh year," said the law, "shall be a Sabbath of rest unto the land."* But, for the purpose of determining what was to be understood by the seventh year, it was added—"Thou shalt number seven Sabbaths of years unto thee, (or seven weeks of years,) seven times seven years ; and the space of the seven Sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years ; - - - And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land."† This mode of computation tended to clothe the sayings of the prophets with that degree of obscurity which we have seen to be essential to their purpose ; and it was accordingly adopt-

* Lev. chap. xxv. ver. 4.

† Ver. 8, 10.

ed in the Book of Daniel, with reference to the duration of the Jewish commonwealth after the return of the people from the Babylonish captivity, and also with reference to the corresponding time which had been fixed for the advent of the Messiah. The Angel Gabriel is represented as saying to Daniel—"Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy. - - - After three score and two weeks, shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself; and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood; and unto the end of the war desolations are determined." *

It is not necessary for my present purpose, to bring into view any other part of this very remarkable prophecy; nor should there be any difficulty in the interpretation of those parts of it which I have quoted. Understanding that Daniel's weeks denote weeks of years, or, in other words, that the seven days of each week denote seven years, we arrive at two conclusions.—In the first place, the

* Dan. chap. ix. ver. 24, 26.

seventy weeks in the prophecy amount to 490 years, which appear to be the time that actually elapsed from the going forth of the commandment for rebuilding Jerusalem to the year in which it was ultimately destroyed ;—And, in the second place, reckoning three score and two weeks from the same date, for fixing the time when “ Messiah was to be cut off, but not for himself,” our calculation brings us down to that period in the life of Christ, when he may be supposed to have become fully susceptible, as a man, of those afflictions which terminated in his death.

What possible objection can there be to this interpretation, or what doubt entertained about the application and fulfilment of the prophecy ? We have seen that the law given to the Jews directed them to the mode of computing time which is here adopted,—consequently that Daniel had, besides the sanction of custom, direct authority for such a computation. Our interpretation of his language is, therefore, both natural and authorized ;—And, considering the prophecy in all its concomitant circumstances, a more literal interpretation of it would even be absurd.

We have, thus, a body of Old Testament prophecy concerning the character, the condition, and the work, of the promised Messiah, terminating

with a distinct intimation of the time of his appearance on earth,—given at least 500 years before the time which was so fixed and determined ; And we have found that all the prophecies now in question, received such an exact fulfilment in Christ, as should render it difficult for any man to deny, that he was the person, from the beginning, promised and designed as the great deliverer of the human race.

But, besides the prophecies which have been fulfilled in the appearance and work of the Saviour on earth, there are others relative to the subsequent fortunes both of the Christian Church and of the Jewish nation, which call for attention in our present argument, and shall therefore be the subject of the next Section.

SECTION V.

THERE ARE MANY PROPHECIES RESPECTING THE SUBSEQUENT FORTUNES BOTH OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND OF THE JEWISH NATION, WHICH HAVE BEEN SO FAR FULFILLED AS TO AFFORD A STRONG PLEDGE OF THEIR ULTIMATE AND PERFECT ACCOMPLISHMENT.

IN a variety of Old Testament prophecies, to which I have already referred, as bearing on the advent of the Messiah and the purpose of his mission, there was also intimation given of the blessed effect of his coming, and the extensive prevalence of his religion. We have seen it plainly foretold, that the light which was to shine on the world should have the effect of turning men from idolatry to the worship of the true God, and that all nations should partake of this blessing. Nor is it in the Old Testament alone that we find such prophetic intimations. We learn from the Evangelists, that Christ himself, during his abode upon earth, foretold, in very remarkable words, the enlargement of his spiritual kingdom ;—He compared it to “ a grain of mustard seed, which a man

took and sowed in his field ; which, indeed," says he, " is the least of all seeds ; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."* The circumstances in which this prophecy was fulfilled, and the means by which it was accomplished, soon after Christ had left the world, will furnish a separate argument for the Divine origin of the Christian faith, which, in this place, I have no desire to anticipate. But, in the mean time, there cannot be a doubt of its having received both a speedy and ample fulfilment by the conversion of an innumerable multitude of the heathen to the faith of the Gospel ;—nor can we, with reason, ascribe to human sagacity the foresight of an event so little akin to any thing which had been before exemplified in the world.

I might, indeed, avail myself, in this place,—and with no small advantage,—of those prophecies also which relate to the more adverse fortunes of Christianity,—to those corruptions of its doctrine and worship which were foretold,—in the first place, by the Prophet Daniel,—afterwards by Paul, in two of his Epistles,—and latterly by John,

* Matth. chap. xiii. ver. 31, 32.

in the Book of Revelation. But I am contented to forego, in a great measure, this advantage, rather than occupy my pages with such a controversy about the fulfilment of these prophecies in the corruptions of the Church of Rome, as would prove incompatible with both the simplicity and the brevity of discussion, which I think it essential to maintain.—It will at least be admitted, that great corruptions were predicted ; and even without our ascertaining in what particular events the prophecies in question have had their fulfilment, it will scarcely be denied, either that much evil, corresponding to what was foretold, has prevailed among one class or other of men who had received the gospel,—or that the early and avowed anticipation of such abuses was peculiarly indicative of candour and integrity in those friends of the Christian cause by whom the prophetic warning was given.—I therefore hasten to the consideration of other prophecies, about the fulfilment of which there seems to be less room for controversy.

We have seen that, connected with the prophecy of Daniel respecting the time of the Saviour's advent, there was an explicit intimation of the utter overthrow of the Jewish polity and commonwealth, as an event to be speedily accomplished after Messiah should " be cut off, but not

for himself." To leave us in no doubt that the prophet meant to represent, not merely the destruction of Jerusalem, but the termination of the Jewish economy, he expressly foretold that, during the last of the seventy weeks, the sacrifice and oblation should cease. Accordingly, Christ himself, towards the close of his ministry on earth, explicitly intimated that these events should be accomplished during the lifetime of some of those whom he addressed. With a view to *their* interest and safety, he not only gave them signs of the time "when these things should come to pass," but directed them to the way in which they might escape from the accompanying danger. "When ye shall see Jerusalem," says he, "encompassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh; then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains."* And, as a proof that the sacrifice and oblation should permanently cease; or, in other words, that there should be an end of the Mosaic ritual, he foretold more particularly the utter demolition of the Temple, which had been appropriated to that ritual service. "There shall not," said he, "be left one stone of it upon another that shall not be thrown down."†

It is not denied, I believe, that the historical

* Luke, chap. xxi, ver. 20, 21. † Ibid. chap. xxi, ver. 6.

account of the destruction of Jerusalem, about thirty-six years after the death of Christ, is strictly conformable, not only to his prophetic language, which I have now quoted, but to all the circumstances of the case, as represented by him in a long discourse recorded by three of the Evangelists. The only resort, therefore, of the unbeliever, is to suppose that what the New Testament contains on this subject, must have been written, not before, but after the event,—a supposition which, to say the least, must be regarded as a very violent one. For we have already seen satisfactory evidence of such an early publication of those books of the New Testament called Gospels, as renders it very nearly impossible that they can have been written after the destruction of Jerusalem. But if any reader, whose impression of this evidence is in want of being renewed, shall be averse to look back to it, as stated in a former chapter, he may perhaps be excused from taking that trouble; for we shall find that other prophecies respecting the future condition of the Jews, have received their fulfilment in ages so very distant from that in which they were published, as to preclude all objection of a similar kind.

After Moses, the founder and lawgiver of the Israelitish nation, had given them the most en-

couraging promises of national prosperity, as the reward of fidelity and obedience to their Divine Benefactor, and had also warned them that, if they should forsake the service of God, they should be scattered among the heathen, and that their "land should be desolate, and their cities waste,"—he, in the name of God, subjoined these gracious words;—"Yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God."* And the Prophet Jeremiah, adverting to the same case, represents the Divine Being as making a similar promise, in terms of still more remarkable import;—"Fear thou not, O Jacob, my servant; for I will make a full end of all the nations, whither I have driven thee; but I will not make a full end of thee."†

This prophecy is not to be understood as applicable to the great body of the ten tribes, who revolted from their allegiance to the house of David; for they appear to have been ultimately lost, as a separate people, in the land of their captivity. But the divine origin of the prophecy is abundantly manifest in the fortunes of that remainder of the seed of Jacob which constituted the Jewish

* Lev. chap. xxvi. ver. 44. † Jer. chap. xlv. ver. 28.

nation. Before the advent of the Messiah, this prophecy had been, in their case, so far fulfilled, by their being preserved as a separate people, during their captivity in Babylon, and by their being afterwards re-established in their own land,—while “a full end” had been made of the nation which had held them captive. But, in the course of providence, the same prediction was to receive a more remarkable fulfilment; and with this view it was, in the meanwhile, repeated and illustrated by a New Testament prophet.

The Apostle Paul, referring to the rejection of the Jews, and comparing the Church of God upon earth to an olive tree, represents them as branches broken off, on account of their unbelief, but adds, that “God is able to graff them in again.” Then, dismissing the metaphor, he reveals explicitly the gracious design of Heaven in their behalf;—“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.”* In connexion with what was so fixed

* Rom. chap. xi. ver. 25, 26, 27.

and determined, the Apostle also refers to the wise and gracious purpose of Divine Providence, both in the rejection of the Jews, and in their ultimate restoration. "Have they stumbled," says he, "that they should fall? God forbid: But rather that, through their fall, salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them (the Jews) to jealousy. Now, if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness? - - - If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?"*

The prophetic language of Paul, considered in this connexion, denotes not only that the rejection of the Jews was to prove subservient to the conversion of the Gentiles, but that their restoration would have an effect, still more powerful, to promote the ingathering of the remainder of the Gentile world, within the pale of the Christian Church;—and, in the latter view more particularly, I shall have occasion to consider this prophecy.

But the primary question is—In what degree, if any, the prophecies now in question have been hitherto fulfilled.

Most certainly, the great body of the Jews have

* Rom. chap. xi, ver. 11, 12, 15.

not hitherto been brought to the faith of Christ. But has there been nothing in their condition, from the dissolution of their polity and commonwealth to the present day, which may be regarded as a *partial* fulfilment of the prophecies which I have quoted, and as affording a strong pledge of their ultimate and complete fulfilment ?

In order to the Jews being ultimately restored as a nation, it was obviously necessary that they should be, in the meanwhile, preserved as a separate people. Had they so mingled, by intermarriage and otherwise, with the people among whom they lived, during their absence from their own land, as to be no longer distinguishable from them,—had the descendants of those Jews, who were dispersed, after the destruction of Jerusalem, become in this way, as others have become, merely an integral part of the community with which their fathers had mingled,—it would have been folly to speak of their being afterwards restored as a nation. But the existence of the Jews, at this day, as a people distinct from all the nations among which they have sojourned, is too obvious to be questioned. Up to the present time, the original prophecy of Jeremiah respecting them is obviously fulfilled. For while God appears to have made “ a full end ” of other nations, we

know that, during more than seventeen hundred years subsequent to the dispersion of the Jews, he has not made "a full end" of them. Their condition at this day, in respect of both number and distinguishing character, still admits of our supposing that they may be restored as a nation. Even the predictions of Paul respecting them are so far verified ; for, that they should be preserved as a separate people, during the period of their dispersion, must be held as implied in the prophecy of their ultimate restoration.

In these circumstances, two questions arise—first, In what degree the existing condition of the Jews, regarded as a fulfilment of prophecy, serves to prove the Divine inspiration of the Old and New Testaments ; and, secondly, In what degree, if at all, it should strengthen our faith in the ultimate and complete fulfilment of what has been predicted respecting that peculiar people.

But, in order to our arriving at such a conclusion, in reference to these points, as all the circumstances of the case are calculated to warrant, it is essential to consider whether any *natural* account can be given of the existing condition of the Jews, or whether, in the absence of such natural causes as might serve to account for it, we must not

ascribe it to such a peculiar interposition of providence as renders it in some sense miraculous.

Certain it is, that their existence as a separate people, after they have been so long dispersed among the other nations of the earth,—without any land or dwelling-place which they could call their own, as a bond of mutual connexion,—forms a very extraordinary case in the history of the human race;—a very short period, comparatively, seems to have completely incorporated other nations with the people among whom they were dispersed.

It is not very difficult, indeed, to account for the Jews having continued a distinct race during the Babylonish captivity; for, as that captivity did not endure longer than about seventy years, it is natural to suppose that the generation, which had been carried away from Judea, had not become altogether extinct, till about the time of their posterity returning to the land of their fathers; and, for so short a period as seventy years, it could not be very difficult to trace the history of every separate family, including all its connexions and descendants. But very different is the case which now presents itself. Considering the length of time which has elapsed, since the Jews were last removed from their own land,—any registers which they

may have endeavoured to keep must have been exposed to such innumerable hazards, and they must have had such inducements to put an end to all remembrance of their separate origin, by intermarriage with other nations,—the various countries, so distant from each other, over which they have been scattered, must have rendered their mutual communication so difficult and imperfect,—their condition, in all respects, must have involved such obstacles to their continuing as a separate people,—that any mind, which could have looked forward to these obstacles, must have pronounced them insurmountable.

In what way, then, are we to account for the undeniable fact—that, dispersed as they have been over all the nations of the civilized world, they still remain as much one distinct people as when they inhabited the land of Judea,—and a people, we have cause to believe, not less numerous than they were in their most prosperous state as a nation? Are there any circumstances, peculiar to them as a people, which will *naturally* account for these things?

They were originally distinguished from other nations by a ceremonial law, and a corresponding ritual service, to which they still religiously ad-

here. Can it be that their attachment to these has been so strong as to prove a bond of union which nothing could dissolve?—While they were in their own land, the institutions to which I now refer were regarded by them as a grievous burden.—Even after the Babylonish captivity,—though they appear to have been less prone, than formerly, to idolatrous worship, and consequently steadfast in their observance of the Mosaic ritual,—it was still spoken of as a yoke which neither they nor their fathers could bear. So far, therefore, as the memory of their origin, and their designation as a separate people, could impose on them, after their dispersion, an obligation to the ceremonial law, one would suppose that they might have been induced rather to bury in oblivion, than sedulously to keep in mind, all that tended to distinguish and separate them from the other nations of the earth.

Perhaps more influence may be fairly ascribed to the hope which they have entertained of being restored in a national capacity to the land of their fathers. Hope is a powerful principle, and may have operated strongly as a bond of union. But we must not allow ourselves to suppose that their ground of hope in this case has been equal to that confidence in their ultimate restoration which Christians are warranted to entertain. As Chris-

tians, we can account for their long-continued suffering, in a way which opens a natural prospect of their restoration, by enabling us to anticipate an event which may very naturally lead to it. Considering that it is in this world only that men can be either rewarded or punished in their national capacity, we have good cause to ascribe the unprecedented suffering of the Jews, as a people or nation, to an act of unprecedented, and hitherto unrepented, national iniquity,—viz. that, as a nation, they had, “with wicked hands, crucified and slain the only begotten Son of God.” We have, therefore, ground to suppose, that when, as a nation, they shall have repented of this unexampled atrocity, and shall, in consequence, embrace Christ as a Saviour, they may yet be restored to that favour with God, which was long their distinguishing portion. But, in their present state of impenitence and consequent infidelity, it is altogether impossible for themselves to take the same encouraging view of what awaits them as a people. They are themselves unable to account for the national punishment which they have so long endured in any way which can open a reasonable prospect of its termination. In their present state of mind, any reason which they can assign for their having been so long rejected of God, must leave them ground to fear that He whom they have

offended has cast them off for ever ;—and, in such circumstances, they must find it proportionally difficult to build their hope even on those promises of Old Testament Scripture, which, as Christians, we are strongly encouraged to interpret in a way favourable to their ultimate restoration.

I do not mean to say that, even in these circumstances, they have not entertained a hope of being restored to the land of their fathers. But, if such a hope has contributed to their preservation, in the meanwhile, as a separate people, To what are we to ascribe the strength and the prevalence of this hope ? Considering that, for the reasons which I have stated, their *natural* ground of hope was weak, and accompanied with much cause for despondency, To what is it possible for us to attribute its strength and prevalence within them, but to such a Divine and preternatural influence as imparts to the whole case a miraculous aspect ?

Now, if upon these grounds, we be entitled to ascribe the continued existence of the Jews as a separate people to such a Divine interposition as appears in some sense miraculous, it may well be considered as, in itself, very powerful evidence of the truth of Divine revelation ;—so far as a standing miracle is compatible with the nature of things, what we have now traced may be regarded as pro-

longing to the world the benefit of that evidence which results from miracles. But, as it is only in aid of the argument from prophecy that the case of the Jews is now before us, the immediate question is—Whether the miraculous aspect of their condition does not strengthen the evidence arising from those *predictions* of it which have been brought under our review.

I do not say that either the Apostle Paul or the Prophets of the Old Testament foresaw such a long-continued dispersion of the Jews, as now renders it impossible to account for their having continued a separate people, without a peculiar interposition of Providence ;—I do not say, that the Prophets foresaw and foretold it, as an event which they knew was to be accomplished by miraculous agency. But is it to be held as nothing, in the scale of evidence, that the event, which they were enabled to foretell, involves in it a miraculous result ? Does not this circumstance make it more obviously impossible that the precise event in question should have been foreseen by any human sagacity ? Does it not even afford some indication that they who foretold it, spoke or wrote under the influence of a more plenary inspiration than has been in other cases exemplified ? Does it not, in these views, impart additional strength

to that evidence which results from the fulfilment of prophecy ?

Leaving these questions to the judgment of the reader, I would now beseech him to consider more particularly—whether the existing condition of the Jews, as the result of a special interposition of Providence, ought not to establish our confidence in what has been farther predicted respecting them.

For what other purpose than their re-establishment, at length, as a nation, can it be supposed that Providence has so interposed for preserving them in the meanwhile as a separate people ? It is not the way of God to do any thing in vain,—far less to control and supersede the ordinary course of human affairs, so remarkably as we have traced in the case before us, without a view to the accomplishment of some important purpose. The ultimate conversion of the Jews, as a peculiar people to whom the promises of the Messiah had been originally given,—their ultimate conversion, as a distinct race, to the faith and obedience of the Gospel, and their consequent re-establishment in their own land, as a distinguished portion of the visible church of God upon earth,—a triumph, so signal, of the once crucified but now glorified Redeemer of men, presents to the contemplative

mind an object of such paramount importance, as at once accounts for any extraordinary interposition which may have been necessary to prevent that people from being incorporated in the meanwhile with other nations. But, without a view to this glorious event, no final cause whatever can be assigned for such an anomaly in the course of Providence as their remaining, till now, a separate people. The fact, as it presents itself to our bodily eyes, would, in this case, constitute an exception from a rule which has been, hitherto, found applicable to all the ways of God. So far, at least, as we can judge, it would be a miracle very different from any that has ever been known, or that ever will be exemplified,—for it would be a miracle without a purpose or object, and consequently inconsistent with an inviolable principle of the moral government of the Divine Being.

It is not surely too much to say, that we have, in these circumstances, more than ordinary ground for confidence in the fulfilment of those prophecies which relate to the conversion and ultimate restoration of the Jews as a people and nation ;—we have such a pledge for their fulfilment as never was given in any other case ;—we have a pledge which, in its nature, amounts to an *anticipation* of ultimate fulfilment, and in the meantime realizes that event to every believing mind.

Yet greater and more glorious than the event itself, are the consequences to be reasonably expected from it.

It is well known that, in both the Old and New Testaments, there are prophecies of an ultimate and universal prevalence of the Christian faith. To these prophecies it is objected, that, whatever prospect there may have been in the early ages of Christianity, the slow progress—if progress there be—which the Gospel now makes, forbids all hope of their fulfilment. But such reasoning may well be regarded as presumptuous. It obviously sets limits to what may hereafter be accomplished by Divine agency; and it proceeds, more particularly, on a supposition that the course of outward events is, at no period, to prove more favourable than it now is to a more extended propagation of the Gospel. Yet it should not be difficult to perceive, that the conversion and restoration of the Jews as a people and nation—an event for the fulfilment of which we have found that we have such a *visible* pledge as no unprejudiced mind can disregard,—may be fairly and reasonably expected to have a boundless effect in opening the eyes of men, even in “the uttermost parts of the earth,” to perceive and acknowledge the truth of the Gospel. The visible accomplishment of a promise so early given,—the preservation of the Jews as a separate

people, so obviously with a view to the accomplishment of that promise, and the illustrious nature of the long-expected event itself, regarded as the consequence of a Divine interposition,—the illustration which will be thereby afforded of the ways of God from the beginning,—of his truth and unchangeableness, and of the consequent consistency of all the dispensations of his providence,—may well be expected to have the effect of bringing all his rational offspring on earth to give glory to their Father in Heaven, and to his only begotten Son, as the more immediate Redeemer of our guilty race.

IN the meantime, I trust that such views as have been presented of the great scheme of prophecy, relative to the salvation of men, and of its unequivocal fulfilment, so far as the progress of time has admitted, cannot fail to make an impression on every unprejudiced mind.—Prophecy has not been much resorted to for evidence in support of any false religion. It has been declined by impostors, not only as a severe ordeal of their pretensions, but as too circuitous a mode of accomplishing their purpose. However confident they may have been in their own sagacity and

foresight, respecting any future and distant event, the very distance of the time at which they could have a chance of being found right in their conjecture, has left them no hope of deriving from it that worldly advantage at which alone they aimed. But, for a reason in some sense corresponding to this, yet directly opposite, the wisdom of God has rested the evidence of the Christian revelation, in a great measure, on the fulfilment of prophecy. The benefit of men of all ages,—from the beginning to the end of time,—being equally the purpose and object of the Divine Being, the requisite postponement of an advantage has not been a reason, with him, against employing the best means of its being ultimately realized. A compensation was, in the meanwhile, to be made to those to whom he was pleased to reveal himself, by his affording to them, in various ways, more direct communications of his immediate presence. These communications were, in the course of Providence, to be discontinued, only in proportion to the degree in which the evidences of a standing revelation should be rendered more perfect. This object was to be accomplished, not only by means of a permanent and unchangeable record of the Divine counsel and will,—but, in connexion with that record, by the gradual fulfilment of prophecy. To us, accordingly, in these latter times, the evi-

dence arising from prophecy has acquired much increased importance ; and, when it shall have attained all the plenitude of its destined power, it will, I doubt not, be the great outward mean of putting an end to infidelity among men.

CHAPTER V.

THE PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL IN EARLY AGES,
WHEN CONSIDERED IN ALL ITS CIRCUMSTANCES,
SHOULD CONTRIBUTE STILL FARTHER TO SATISFY
EVERY CANDID MIND THAT IT HAS TRULY PRO-
CEEDED FROM GOD.

I FORMERLY adverted to the propagation of the Gospel as a fulfilment of prophecy ; but we shall find that it also affords separate and more direct evidence of the Divine origin of the Christian faith.

To enable the reader, therefore, to estimate this evidence,—let us attend to the progress which Christianity made during its earliest ages,—to the peculiar circumstances in which it so prevailed,—to the outward means employed for that purpose,—and to the inferences which we may fairly derive from these views of the case, either separately or combined.

From the book of the *Acts of the Apostles*, and

from some passages in the Epistles of Paul, we learn that, within a very few years after the death of Christ, not only had many been converted to the Christian faith in Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria,—the Gospel had been preached, and embraced by multitudes, in the most considerable cities and provinces of both Asia and Europe,—in Antioch, Ephesus, and Galatia,—in Athens, Corinth, and Macedonia,—even in Rome, the capital of the civilized world.

But, if the testimonies, to which I now refer, be received with hesitation, as proceeding from friends of the Christian cause, it is fortunate that we have attestations of a similar and stronger import, proceeding from its avowed enemies.

In proving the truth of the Gospel history, I had occasion to make quotations from the writings of Suetonius, Tacitus, and Pliny, in which they have borne undesigned testimony to the prevalence of the Gospel, (certainly undesigned so far as concerns any view to promote it,) both in the city of Rome, and in one, at least, of the provinces of the Roman Empire. We have seen that, in the history of the reign of Claudius, who became Emperor of Rome only about seven years after the death of Christ, Suetonius represented the Christians as a body so numerous as to have excited

the jealousy of the imperial government. We have also seen that, about 30 years after Christ's death, Tacitus spoke of them as "a vast multitude," and that, about 50 years later, the younger Pliny, in his celebrated letter to the Emperor *Trajan*, represented the prevalence of Christianity to have been so great, in the province of which he was governor, that, for some time, the temples of heathen worship had been desolate, and its sacred rites neglected.

While we have such a corroboration, from heathen authors, of the scriptural testimony on this point, with reference to the apostolic age,—we find that subsequent, though uninspired, Christian writers, during the second century,—such as Justin Martyr and Tertullian,—appealed, in language which publicly defied contradiction, to the prevalence of Christianity in every country or nation, which was either subject to the Roman government, or had, through its means, become accessible to those who preached the glad tidings of salvation.

There has, indeed, been so general an admission of the rapid and extensive propagation of Christianity in the ages to which I refer, that I should not think myself justified in detaining the reader by a more particular review of the testimonies by which it is verified. It is more necessary to con-

sider the *circumstances* in which the Gospel of Christ appears to have so remarkably prevailed.

It will not be denied, that the age in which Christ appeared, was distinguished, as I formerly observed, by high attainments in human learning. Nor will it be pretended that, for a considerable time subsequent to his death, the world had so far lost this advantage, as not to be well qualified to form an estimate both of the doctrine which was preached in his name, and of the evidence by which its truth was established. Perhaps the advantage in question was more confined, than it now is, to the higher ranks of society. But this consideration cannot weaken our argument; for it is impossible to suppose that, when the Gospel appeared to prevail, men of rank and influence could remain inattentive to either its import or its claims. It is well known that, in fact, it commanded the attention of such men as had it in their power, in respect of both learning and influence, either to vindicate and uphold its truth, or to detect and expose its fallacy. We know that, by some men of this description, and not an inconsiderable number, it was acknowledged and received as the doctrine of God;—and surely their profession of the Christian faith should have led others to refute, if it had been in their power, its pretensions to a

Divine origin. It is impossible that the reader can, in this view, lightly regard the mention of such men, among the Jews, as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, both members of the Sanhedrim, with “a great company of the priests,” who, soon after the ascension of Christ, “became obedient to the faith;”—or, among other converts, the names of *Sergius Paulus*, a Roman proconsul; *Dionysius*, a senator of Athens; *Flavius*, who suffered martyrdom at Rome during his consulship; and *Justin Martyr*, who, both before and after his conversion, approved himself one of the most learned of his age. With a knowledge that men like these avowed themselves believers in the doctrine of Christ, and that others had an equal opportunity both of examining its claims, and of justifying their unbelief, we cannot possibly refuse to his religion the full credit of having been originally taught and propagated under the eye and observation of many who were well qualified to detect imposture. Nor can the reader fail to perceive that, while the Christian doctrine, if founded in truth, had in this respect a mighty advantage, it must be difficult indeed,—on the supposition of its being false,—to account for its being favourably received in such circumstances.

While the learning of the age was calculated to

discourage the attempts of an impostor, there was no countervailing advantage for the introduction of any new and false religion. Among the different nations of the heathen world, the great mass of the people were attached to one or other of the systems of superstition which had long prevailed. Many of their superstitious rites, and the temples devoted to them, had the advantage of an outward splendour, which was calculated to dazzle and gratify an ignorant multitude. And, though there may have been learned and enlightened individuals convinced in their own minds, of the vanity of the popular faith, and its accompanying worship, it is not to be supposed that they would be inclined to exchange one superstition for another, or to renounce the religion of their fathers for any thing else, under the name of religion, which they did not believe to come from Heaven.

Certain it is, that the Gospel held out to men no worldly advantage that could induce them to make such a change. Yet it is equally certain, that it openly and explicitly laid claim to, and demanded, the exclusive faith and acceptance of men of all nations and languages. It offered no compromise with any thing that was called religion among the heathen. It proclaimed, on the contrary, a spiritual warfare against every system of

superstition which prevailed in the habitable world. Such pretensions and claims were obviously calculated to arm against it men of all nations who should not be convinced of its Divine origin. They were calculated to engage, in a simultaneous resistance,—in one extensive conspiracy for its suppression,—the votaries of idolatrous worship in every country under heaven.

The preaching of the Gospel, accordingly, had this effect. The nations of the world had been, hitherto, forbearing to each other in matters connected with religion ; because nothing which, under the name of religion, prevailed in one nation, had laid claim to acceptance in another. But, from the time when Christ left the world, till his religion became the predominant faith of the Roman empire and of those who reigned over it, the rulers of an idolatrous people continued to take counsel against the Lord and his Anointed, and did not fail to employ, for the accomplishment of their purpose, all the means which a persecuting spirit could suggest.

From the New Testament we learn, that the persecution of the Christians had its beginning in Judea ; and, though it seems to have originated in a popular impulse, it was systematically followed out at the instance of the rulers of the Jews. *Saul*, who was afterwards known under another

name as an Apostle of Christ, appears to have had authority for this purpose from the High Priest; and we are told, that “ he made havock of the church, entering every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison.” In his own person also, he afterwards endured what he had been so forward to inflict upon others; and, throughout his Epistles to different Churches, he makes frequent reference to the severe persecution with which *they* had been visited, and to the faith and patience with which they had sustained it.

But the most particular account that we have of what the early Christians suffered on account of their religion, is furnished by heathen writers, who, as enemies of the Christian faith, cannot be suspected of a design to uphold its credit by any exaggerated statement.

The same passages in the writings of Suetonius and Tacitus, by which we have proved the truth of the Gospel history, and the rapid propagation of the Christian faith, afford sufficient evidence of the persecution which Christians endured. Suetonius, indeed, only states generally, that, under the reign of Nero, “ the Christians were punished with death,” as “ a people addicted to a new and dangerous superstition.” But Tacitus acquaints us, in a passage already quoted, that Nero “ punished them with the most exquisite

sufferings,”—that “ a vast multitude were made a sport of in their death, being covered with the skins of wild beasts, that they might be torn to pieces of dogs, or covered with inflammable matter, and, when the daylight failed, they were burnt to give light.”*

Let it only be remembered, that it was in the face of such persecution that Christianity made the rapid progress of which we have found similar evidence. So far from the torture inflicted having induced the great body of professing Christians to renounce their profession, the patience and fortitude, with which they endured the most exquisite and protracted suffering, seem to have had the effect of gaining new converts to the Christian faith. It was in such circumstances that “ the word of God mightily grew and prevailed.”

Is it too much to conclude, from this view of the case, that the early Christians were sincere in their profession ?

I am aware of its having been contended, that the pride and obstinacy of the human mind may induce a man to submit to death itself, rather than renounce a falsehood which he has long maintain-

* Annal. xv.

ed. But does not this argument proceed on a supposition, that the man has been from the beginning conscious of falsehood, and has maintained it for some sinister end or purpose, which it would disgrace him to acknowledge? If this be the principle or ground of the argument,—In what possible way can it be applied to the case of the early Christians? By what sinister motive could they be influenced, at first, in avowing themselves disciples of Christ? It was impossible that they could have any worldly interest to serve by it; they could not, therefore, have any motive, originally, but a regard to truth, or to their spiritual and everlasting interest. In these circumstances, if they had at length found themselves to have been deceived, there could not have been much disgrace in confessing it; nor is it very credible that any man would submit to death rather than acknowledge a mere mistake, or misapprehension, of which he had been at length convinced.

Yet this is not the most decisive view which we may fairly take of the martyrdom of the early Christians. We may presume that many of them originally embraced Christianity with a distinct understanding that the profession of it was *likely* to subject them to severe persecution, if not to a premature and violent death. The close succes-

sion of persecuting measures, at the instance of the Roman emperors, during the first three centuries of the Christian era, fully justifies this presumption. It seems impossible, indeed, to doubt, that during the second and third centuries, the greater number of converts must have made their first avowal of Christianity with a deliberate view to the hazards of persecution. This consideration seems to be fatal to the argument in question as urged by the unbeliever ; for it is certainly gratuitous and unjustifiable to suppose, that the pride or obstinacy of the human mind was the cause of the early Christians patiently submitting to *that* suffering which they had contemplated from the beginning, as a price which they might, at any time, be called to pay for their adherence to the cause of Christ.

But, supposing that a few individuals might be suspected of maintaining, at the expense of their lives, what they knew to be a falsehood, and of doing so in circumstances which seem to render such conduct unaccountable,—Are we to make the same supposition in reference to all the innumerable host of martyrs to the faith of the Gospel ? Before the persecution of Christianity was terminated, we have cause to believe that more than one half of the civilized world had become Chris-

tian ;—The number of individuals, who had, in the meanwhile, suffered in the cause of Christ, seems to have been incalculable ; and even they who remained alive had not maintained their profession without anticipating persecution. Is it really to be supposed that they all acted a part which is not to be accounted for upon any of the ordinary and recognised principles of human conduct ? The supposition would involve an absurdity.

It will not, therefore, be easy for any man to controvert the conclusion, that the early Christians were *sincere* in their profession. Yet it is not less certain that the sincerity of the earliest converts is very nearly sufficient evidence of the truth of what they believed,—inasmuch as it seems to have been very nearly impossible that they could themselves be deceived respecting it.

We have seen that Paul, in several of his Epistles, makes reference to a great variety of miracles, which had been wrought by himself and others, among those to whom he wrote. The Christians, therefore, in his time, were not in the condition of men believing *merely on the report of others*, concerning the miracles which Christ himself had originally performed. They had the testimony of their own bodily senses respecting miracles which

continued to be wrought, for the purpose of proving his Divine mission, as well as the Divine mission of those who taught in his name. And it was almost impossible that they could be deceived about the miracles in question ; for their number was not so limited as to admit of all the requisite means of deception being in every case employed. Nor was it in one city or country alone, or among one society of Christians to the exclusion of others, that such miracles appear to have been wrought. The Christians of one province had the advantage of comparing all that they had themselves seen with what their brethren, elsewhere, attested. The means of detecting imposture were in this way so multiplied as to afford nearly all the security against it, which the condition of human things seems to admit ; and if, in any one case, a cheat or imposition had been discovered, in no other could credit have been given to the authors of it.

Still more unreasonable would it be to suppose that the earliest Christians were deceived, or their minds overpowered, by the *reasoning* or *argument* employed for gaining them over to the faith of Christ. The Apostles, with the exception of one, appear to have been comparatively illiterate ; — Their assistants also in the ministry were, generally speaking, of the same description. Their opponents, on the other hand, — the men who concei-

ved that they had an interest in upholding the superstitions of the heathen world,—comprehended in their number all who were distinguished for learning and eloquence, in an age which was itself distinguished by unexampled attainments in both. To this advantage they added all that influence over the minds of others which is the natural result of high station, with its ordinary accompaniments of wealth and power. Is it possible, in these circumstances, to ascribe the wonderful success of the new religion to any natural superiority which its teachers possessed? Or, does not the propagation of the Christian faith, considered in this view, render it more obviously hopeless to attempt accounting for it on the supposition of its votaries having been deceived?

Yet, if we cannot account for the conduct of the early Christians, upon a supposition of their having been deceived, and have, at the same time, found it impossible to reject the evidence which they afforded of their sincerity, at what conclusion shall we arrive? There seems to be no alternative, but to admit that their teachers actually wrought miracles, and communicated to them the truths of God.

There is, indeed, other and analogous ground

on which the same conclusion seems to be unavoidable. For the inferiority of the Christian teachers, in respect of natural endowments, while it must have rendered hopeless any attempt at deception, also calls us to consider—whether it was possible for such men, *without preternatural aid*, even to have maintained the cause of *truth*, in opposition to the learning and eloquence, as well as worldly influence, with which they had to contend. To say the least, there is no example in the history of the world of any great object, however just and laudable, having been accomplished by means so unlikely.

In these circumstances, an admission of the reality of the miracles removes much difficulty. It enables us to perceive, that the teachers of Christianity were furnished with a practical argument, addressed to the bodily senses of men, which it was impossible for any fair and candid mind to resist, and that, under the influence of the conviction thereby produced, the early Christians had the strongest motives to adhere to their profession in the face of persecution. It even accounts, in a considerable degree, for the overwhelming disproportion between the success of the first teachers of Christianity, and that of the ministers of Christ in any subsequent age.

Yet I should not be faithful to the cause of Christ, if I ascribed the rapid propagation of the gospel, and its permanent establishment in the world, to nothing else than the miracles in question. The miracles may account for its success, till persecution arose. But are they quite sufficient to account for its continued and rapid propagation in defiance of persecution, and for the patience and fortitude with which its adherents chose to submit to death rather than to renounce the Christian faith? The miracles might well convince those who beheld them of the truth of the Christian doctrine, and thereby impart to them the high advantage of *sincerity* in their profession. But was sincerity alone a sufficient pledge for their maintaining the profession of their faith, in defiance of such persecution as they appear to have endured? Or is it possible to account for such an innumerable body of men and women—of all ages,—in all the various conditions of life,—and of mental endowments equally varied—having submitted to the most exquisite and lingering torture, from which they might have escaped by abjuring the Christian name,—without supposing that their resolution was immediately upheld by preternatural divine influence? Had their conviction of duty only emboldened them to meet a violent death in any of

its more accustomed forms, perhaps human and unaided resolution might have been sufficient to account for it. But the representations, which are given us, of their suffering, considered in connexion with the incalculable number of victims, whose resolution and fortitude triumphed over all that the art of man could inflict, seem to forbid us to ascribe their conduct to any thing that is in the mind of man, unsupported by that Divine power, which can strengthen and enable him for all things.

The world, in respect of its being present and visible,—the terrors with which it assails us, and the corresponding punishments which it is capable of immediately inflicting—have a mighty advantage, in point of influence, over all that is future and unseen. Notwithstanding the paramount importance of what awaits us hereafter, it is well known that the fear of death, or rather of the torture which may be inflicted before death can relieve us, has overcome the resolution and fortitude of some men, who were not merely sincere in their Christian profession, but eminently distinguished by strength of mind, as well as fortified by long experience of the power of religion. How, then, shall we account for an opposite result in circumstances far less favourable?—How shall we account for the triumph of men who had no such advantages? I say—men who had no such ad-

vantages,—for, out of the multitude of martyrs to the faith of Christ, there must have been many who were not remarkable for either native energy of mind, or any previous attainments which could fortify them in the hour of trial. Is it unreasonable—is it not, on the contrary, most natural—to regard *their* triumph as the effect of a Divine interposition, and consequently as affording separate and undeniable evidence, that the cause in which they suffered was the cause of God—upheld by the power of God?

I am aware of its being almost a proverbial observation, that persecution commonly defeats its own purpose. But there is nothing implied in this observation that weakens our present argument. It is true, that persecution did, in some sense, defeat its own purpose in the very case to which I refer. But, strictly speaking, the purpose was defeated, not by the means of persecution employed, but by the glorious and triumphant resistance of the men who were persecuted. It was the conduct which they maintained under persecution—the unshrinking determination of mind with which they adhered to their Christian profession in circumstances of such extraordinary trial—that called other men to consider more duly the claims of that faith by which they were actuated. The question before us, therefore, falls to be determined

upon the ground of its separate and exclusive merits. Persecution may have often defeated its own purpose, when the *natural* powers of the human mind were adequate to all the necessary resistance. Even in such cases, a sincere regard to truth may have been manifested, and may have had an effect to recommend the cause of its votaries ;—or, at least, the operation of a persecuting spirit may have excited the indignation of others, against those who dared to employ such means of accomplishing their object. But no discomfiture of a persecuting purpose, in the natural course of things, can affect the conclusion which we may fairly derive from such a resistance to persecution as transcends any thing that can be ascribed to the unaided powers of man. The last is the case to which our attention is directed in the conduct of an incalculable number of early Christians ; and it does not seem to admit of any other solution than that their minds were upheld by the invisible, and, it may be, unrecognised, influence of Divine power.

The man who duly considers—what it seems impossible to deny—that the Gospel of Christ, within the time to which I have referred, was accepted and embraced by the great body of mankind in all the nations of the civilized world,—that it was promulgated in an enlightened age, and gra-

dually recommended itself to the learned as well as the unlearned of every class and condition,—that the men employed in its propagation were, generally speaking, illiterate, but boldly appealed, for the truth of what they taught, to the evidence of miracles, wrought by them in the most public manner, and under the eye of those to whom they preached,—that, so far from there being any thing in its doctrine that could recommend it to a worldly mind, it inculcated many hard sayings, of which it was early complained that no man could bear them,—that it, notwithstanding, laid claim, from the beginning, to universal acceptance, and virtually declared war against every other system of faith and worship which had prevailed among men,—that it thereby provoked the powers of the world to measures of the most determined hostility,—that the early Christians were, in consequence, exposed to such persecution as had never before been exemplified, and yet maintained their Christian profession with such resolution and fortitude as we cannot reasonably ascribe to the human mind, otherwise than as strengthened and upheld by Divine influence,—that their triumph over the world, in the hour of their departure from it, not only defeated the purpose of their persecutors, but engaged others to embrace a religion which so clearly manifested itself to be of God,—

that, in this way, the doctrine of a crucified Saviour continued to gain ground, till even the rulers of the earth, who had so violently opposed it, were prevailed on, by the force of truth, to become its friends and abettors,—The man who can deliberately consider these things, without perceiving and acknowledging that the religion of Christ was an object of Divine protection, that it was maintained and upheld by an interposition of Divine power,—or, without believing, in consequence, that its author was sent of God,—would not, I apprehend, have believed though he had been an eye-witness of the resurrection of Christ from the state of the dead,

CHAPTER VI.

THE EFFECT WHICH THE GOSPEL HAS PRODUCED ON THE
HEARTS AND THE LIVES OF MEN CONCURS WITH EVERY
OTHER VIEW OF THE CASE IN VINDICATING ITS CLAIM
TO A DIVINE ORIGIN.

BEFORE the manifestation of the Son of God, the wisest of men had combined their efforts to furnish the human mind with powerful and effectual motives to virtue ; and, when the wisdom of man had been found unequal to this arduous task, the wisdom and the grace of God were revealed in the Gospel of Christ for teaching us “ to live soberly, righteously, and godly.”—Does the Gospel serve this invaluable purpose ?

No question can be either more fair or more interesting. They, who at the beginning asserted the value and importance of the Christian faith, could only appeal to the powerful influence which it was calculated to have on human conduct. But, now that its efficacy has been in some measure tried, experience is the fairest test ;—The tree, saith Christ himself, is to be known by its fruit.

Let us, therefore, inquire and consider in what degree the Gospel of Christ appears to serve its declared purpose, and whether the effect which it appears to produce be such as justifies its claim to be regarded as the “power of God, and the wisdom of God.”

In respect of practical influence, the utmost that the Gospel promised, from the beginning, was a partial and progressive reformation in this world, to be perfected in a future state ; and the question—whether it appears to fulfil its promise—is of course to be determined by a comparative view of the morals of men, in two different situations,—on the one hand, that of wanting—and on the other, that of having—the advantage of the wisdom and grace of God as revealed in the Gospel. But, in this inquiry, it is a matter of some difficulty to distinguish and ascertain the facts and circumstances, connected with either side of the comparison, on which our conclusion may be fairly established.

It must not be supposed that the religion of Christ is strictly answerable for the character and conduct of all who call themselves by his name. If there be any considerable number of professing Christians thereby induced to live “soberly,

righteously, and godly," we are in a great measure called to ascribe the opposite conduct of others to a want of that belief or acceptance, which in the first instance constitutes a Christian, and which the Gospel so naturally demands, in order to its operating its effect on the human heart.

But, while I lay claim to this ground of defence against those who might found an objection to my argument on the lives of some men who unwarrantably call themselves by the name of Christ,—I should not do justice to his cause in the world, if I were to confine myself to such narrow ground. For, not only does the Gospel manifest its power in the life and character of all sincere Christians,—it extends its influence indirectly to a reformation of the world at large. When men even outwardly profess a religion of such purity and excellence, they are in some measure deterred from an open violation of its precepts by a regard to consistency of conduct ; and that engaging example of virtue, which true Christians afford, has, at the same time, a powerful influence on others. If some respectable members of society, actuated by Christian principles, be distinguished, for instance, by their deeds of charity, the humanity of others is thereby called forth and encouraged ; schemes of beneficence are more universally adopted ; and, even on the side of virtue, the power of custom or fa-

shion is found to be considerable. Yet the Gospel of Christ is, on this account, apt to lose, instead of gaining, credit with unthinking men ; for, in consequence of the general standard of moral conduct being, by its means, advanced and improved, the difference is less conspicuous between the manners of the true Christian and those of the world around him.

It is also important to consider that we should do injustice to the Christian faith, if, in appreciating its practical influence, we were to proceed upon a comparison between the general character of professing Christians and that of other people, in our own times, who do not profess the Gospel. For the Mahometan faith, which in this case would come into question, was devised by one who had the advantage of an acquaintance with the Christian Revelation ; and any degree of power which it may possess, as a principle of virtuous action, may be justly ascribed to what it has borrowed from the Gospel doctrine.

The fairest and most effectual way of ascertaining the measure of credit which is due to the Gospel of Christ, in respect of its reforming the morals of men, is by a faithful comparison of the general state of moral character in the Christian world, with the state of moral character, in circumstances

otherwise similar, before the Christian doctrine was revealed.

There are, at the same time, bounds which may be set to any such inquiry, so far as concerns the heathen world ; for there is a limited sphere, beyond which it is obvious that we should inquire in vain.

Their religious rites do not appear to have been devised with much view to moral improvement ; some of them, it is well known, were subservient to licentiousness and debauchery. The schools of philosophy, on the other hand, were frequented only by a few. The writings of the learned, had they been more adapted to the capacity of the multitude, were little, if at all, within their reach. There were no stated and public means of moral instruction, similar to what the preaching of the Gospel affords, extending their advantages, as it does, to men of every condition. There was no universally acknowledged standard of moral duty, similar to what the Scriptures contain, open to the examination of all men. However honourable may have been the labours of the heathen sage, to the great body of mankind they were certainly unprofitable. It is, therefore, altogether unnatural to suppose that we should find the moral character of the lowest ranks of society in the

heathen world, superior to that of the few who alone had advantages for its improvement. It is to the well-educated classes alone that we may reasonably look for any favourable view of heathen morals.

Yet, in reference to the wisest and most learned of the heathen, it may also abridge our research to keep in mind the extent of the morality which was inculcated in their writings, as directing us to a point beyond which we should look in vain.

It is well known that many of those virtues, which chiefly adorn the Christian character, were scarcely, if at all, recognised in their systems of moral duty,—far less inculcated with the confidence and decision which are so necessary in the case of lessons that are to influence human conduct. In vain do we search their writings for any just lessons of repentance and purity of heart, or of that humble, and meek, and forgiving spirit, which, in the character of man, as in the sight of God, is an ornament of so great price.

On the other hand, we find evidence of the most perverted moral sentiment in the base characters under which the great body of the people were encouraged to contemplate some of the gods whom they worshipped. It is natural to imitate those

whom we admire and adore ; yet certain it is that, if the character of men in the heathen world was formed on that of their imaginary deities, the standard of human as well as divine perfection, must have been low indeed. Even the melancholy representation, so shocking to the feelings of a Christian, which the Apostle Paul has given, of the manners of the heathen,* need not, in this view, surprise us ; nor can it be matter of wonder that the Apostle himself has traced their gross abominations to the very cause at which I now point,—that of their having “ changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man.”

The Apostle’s language on this subject was addressed to men who had been practically conversant with the case to which he referred. Had his representation been unfounded, it is impossible to suppose that they should have acquiesced in it, and have given him credit for a regard to truth in what he otherwise taught and inculcated. Nor do we any where find such an opposite representation of the character of the heathen, as can give us ground for calling in question the Apostle’s statement.

The descriptions, indeed, which heathen writers

* Rom. chap. i.

have given of the virtue of men like themselves, are in some instances deceitful. A little attention enables us to perceive, that what they exhibit as virtue is rather vice in disguise,—that what is presented to us as proof of a noble mind, has, in fact, proceeded from ferocious passions, which refused to be controlled.—Yet more painful is it to reflect on the *degree* of wickedness, by which many prominent individuals of the heathen world were unquestionably characterised. Upon this point, the historical evidence of which we are possessed,—while it is unequivocal,—is at the same time so generally known, that it would be an abuse of both the time and the patience of the reader to enter into any detail of it.

What, then, has Christianity done for us?—It was certainly to be expected that the sublime and elevating views which it presents, should produce some salutary effect;—And, though Christians have great cause to take shame to themselves, individually, for not having *sufficiently* profited by their advantages, God hath not revealed himself in vain, but hath, in fact, as well as in promise, taught men to live more “soberly, righteously, and godly.”

If the Gospel of Christ has recommended such purity, and humility, and meekness, and charity,

as were not duly recognised by unassisted reason, it has not been without effect. However lamentable be the wickedness which has still prevailed, the Christian world has never been without men, who have been enabled, through Divine grace, to adorn, by these peculiar virtues, the doctrine of their God and Saviour; nor has their example ever been without its influence on the mind and temper of others. If impurity and hatred and revenge still lurk in the heart,—at least they dare not, as in former times, stalk abroad in the face of day, and justify themselves to the world. Acknowledging, as it were, that their deeds are evil, they come not to the light, lest they be reprov- ed.

It is impossible, indeed, to question the efficacy of the Gospel, in respect of some of its distinguishing virtues; for the law of Christ, in regard to them, has so far recommended itself, as to be embraced and sanctioned by human institutions, which confessedly regulate the conduct of men.

The polygamy and the arbitrary divorce, which prevailed in the heathen world, having been forbidden by Christ, the laws of Christian nations have, in that department, adopted the principle, and enforced the practice, of the Christian system;—and, by its interposition in this single case, the Gospel has done more than the wisdom of the

learned, and the authority of the powerful, had before accomplished for improving and perfecting the condition of social life. It has both secured and augmented the domestic virtue, and consequently the domestic happiness, which constitute so large a portion of the virtue and happiness which are chiefly within the sphere of all men.

The Christian law of *Charity*, also, as opposed to hatred and revenge, has manifested its power in a way equally unequivocal; for, throughout the Christian world, it is, in like manner, virtually recognised by the law and the practice of nations. The destructive principle, which renders evil for evil, with no better view than to gratify hatred and revenge, had prevailed among nations as well as individuals. Not only does it appear to have prevailed in the ancient world; even in our times, nations which have not received the Gospel, still appear to act upon it in the prosecution of national hostilities. It is impossible to account otherwise for that inhumanity towards captives in war, which they both practise and avow. But, among Christian nations, not only is an opposite principle avowed,—their practice in a great measure corresponds to it. That Christian forbearance, which so generally deters its votaries from whatever would aggravate the sufferings of the individual foe,—that Christian brotherly kindness which, in the midst of all that would exasperate

the heart, often seeks to alleviate individual suffering,—and that broad principle of Christian charity, which effectually teaches the conqueror to treat the captive with the respect which misfortune claims,—have already, in the view of the observing mind, erected a monument to the honour of the Christian faith,—the magnitude and glory of which will continue to increase, till the art of war shall be no longer taught among men.

Shall I, notwithstanding, be allowed no credit for asserting, that the same virtues do also, in a considerable degree, bind the consciences of Christians in the more private intercourse of life? The unbeliever may, if he will, refuse this admission;—But, if he lives in the Christian world, and mingles in its society, his own experience should convict him of injustice to the Christian name;—it may well convict him of ingratitude for the blessings which he actually derives from the influence of these virtues on the society in which he mingles.

It may perhaps be objected to the conclusion at which I would arrive,—that, in the great work of reforming the world, the progress of the Gospel is slow,—that the spiritual disease, which it is intended to cure, has still a deep root in the constitution of men,—and that a remedy, of more powerful effect, would have more clearly indicated

the skill and capacity of a Divine physician. But would it not be unreasonable that the Gospel of Christ should be held answerable for the accomplishment of more than it promises? Its utmost promise (as I already observed) does not extend to more than a partial and progressive reformation in this world, to be perfected in a future state; and, when a blessing so great is bestowed, it does not become men, who are the objects of it, either to reject or despise it on account of its not being greater.

This consideration appears to me to afford a sufficient answer to the objection in question. But I am not the less willing to give all the additional satisfaction in my power to any sincere inquirer after truth.

It was, no doubt, in the power of that Infinite Being, to whom all things are equally easy of accomplishment, to restore the human race, at once, and without any co-operation of natural means, to the original perfection and happiness of their nature. But, if we only keep in mind that, in reference to this world, God is ordinarily pleased to employ natural means for the accomplishment of his purposes,—and consider, at the same time, the extent of that benevolent design which the Gospel is intended to promote,—if we duly keep

in mind—what the Scriptures plainly intimate—that the condition of the saints in a future state is to be permanent and unchangeable, and that the design of the Gospel is to prepare men for that unchangeable state,—we shall, perhaps, find reason to conclude that the gradual manner in which it operates, so far from weakening its claim to a Divine origin, affords a separate and striking illustration of the wisdom and the grace of its Divine Author.

I am aware that, in bringing forward this view of the subject, I am treading on delicate ground ; for that curiosity, which would induce men to pry with eagerness into the motives of the Divine conduct, and to hazard conjectures respecting them, when no good purpose is to be thereby served, may well be regarded as presumptuous. But, if our inquiry proceed from a sincere desire to attain greater satisfaction and assurance of mind respecting the way of salvation which God hath revealed, and be, at the same time, conducted with modesty, it cannot, I trust, be with reason condemned.

Under these conditions, therefore, let us, for a moment, inquire—whether the preparation of our nature for a state of unchangeable bliss was likely to be best effected by a sudden restoration to its

original purity, or by the slow and progressive operation of the Gospel.

If we may judge from the information communicated to us respecting the intelligent offspring of God, it appears that, of all the wayward passions, it is *pride* that can gain the easiest and earliest admission to intellectual and moral agents in a pure and happy state, and that this is also the passion most directly incompatible with that Divine intercourse, on which their perfection and happiness depend. A proud desire of independence on Him who had created them, appears to have been the essence of that sin by which angels fell. For this reason, the Apostle Paul represents a man “lifted up with pride as falling into the condemnation of the devil;” *—And, accordingly, the devil still appears to assert his equality with God, by soliciting or tempting others *to worship him rather than God*. It is also to pride, in particular, that we are directed to trace that disease of the *human* soul, which the Gospel of Christ is intended to remedy. It was, by infusing into the heart of one of the parents of our race, a proud desire to be as God, that the devil appears to have seduced them into their first transgression.

Is it, in these circumstances, unnatural to sup-

* 1st Tim, chap. iii. ver. 6. .

pose, that the remedy, which the Gospel prescribes, should have a special reference to pride as the *origin* of evil? If such a spirit of humility must now be cultivated in men as shall preclude, for ever, all tendency to a passion which would again deface the image of God in our nature, may it not be necessary that some peculiar means be employed—accommodated to that particular purpose? In connexion with other means so accommodated, with which the Gospel of Christ seems to abound, may it not be essential that the recovery of the human soul, from the ravages which pride had committed, should be, in this world, gradual and slow? A sudden restoration to the perfection and bliss, which we had lost, might have an effect similar to what is produced by the indulgence of a fond but injudicious earthly parent towards a child who is ever offending and ever forgiven, without being rendered duly humble for his past folly and presumption. But the discipline, through which Christians have to pass in this world,—the various troubles which here accrue to us from the present disordered state of our moral frame, and the imperfect success of our best endeavours to recover the perfection and happiness of our nature,—are well calculated to correct every tendency to that proud and froward spirit, with which we are so unhappily infected, and even to clothe

us with humility—with that permanent character of humility, which appears so essential to a future state of permanent perfection and bliss.

Let me only present the case in another, but strictly analogous, view.

It is well known, in regard to the concerns of this world, that any possessions or advantages, of which we have never felt the want, are apt to be undervalued. Even those which have once been lost through our own folly, if they be quickly and easily recovered, are still, perhaps, regarded less than their importance demands ; and our anxiety to maintain and preserve them is proportionally less eager. But, when we have long suffered under the want of any worldly comfort, and have laboured hard for its recovery,—if we be again blessed with the possession, it loses no part of its value in our estimation ;—the contrast between our present and our former condition, opens our eyes to much of its excellence which would otherwise have escaped our notice ; and our attention to preserve it is proportionally watchful, constant, and durable.

Similar to what I thus represent have been, and are likely to be, the feelings and conduct of men in regard to their spiritual possessions. Originally holy and happy, and having never felt the

want of that delight which resulted from a conformity to the will of God,—the parents of our race allowed the pleasures of sin to come in competition with it ; and the preference which they gave too clearly manifested that they were not duly sensible of the value of their first possession. —How, then, or in what way, were they, and we also, as their sinful offspring, to be restored to our forfeited perfection and happiness ? Though the Divine Being still looked upon us with the pity and the distinguishing love of a father,—such an immediate restoration as it was, no doubt, in his power to accomplish, might have been inconsistent with the natural means of impressing us with such a sense of its value as to qualify us for a permanent and unchangeable state. If we must now be taught more highly to value, and more duly to maintain, that conformity to the Divine Image to which we shall yet be restored, any recovery of our disordered frame, produced without labour and difficulty on our part, could but little operate as a natural mean of advancing this design of Heaven. But, left for a time to feel and lament the prevalence of indwelling sin,—Stimulated by the strongest motives to contend against its power,—deriving from Heaven such measures of Divine aid, as serve to cherish our hopes and invigorate our endeavours, but never in this world

completely to fulfil our wishes,—struggling, therefore, with the weakness of our nature, and slowly advancing in our arduous work,—yet at length attaining, by the grace of God, the whole object of our unwearied desire in the blessed mansions above,—we shall never account ourselves able to value, sufficiently, that perfection and bliss to which we are restored,—we shall never forfeit or lose our renewed possession.

How far a more direct and immediate Divine influence may be necessary, even in a future world, for maintaining and increasing, in the saints, the constituents of that glory and happiness in which they shall be reinstated, is a matter which rises far above the sphere of our inquiry. But, instead of our objecting to the Divine origin of the Gospel of Christ, on account of its influence being slow and progressive, it may well delight us to trace, in this very circumstance, such a co-operation of natural means, as may be fairly accounted an earnest of whatever else shall be found necessary for maintaining us hereafter in a state of unchangeable bliss. It must be delightful to know that our nature is now receiving, from the hand of its original Creator, such gradual but certain improvement as may prevent any tendency again to degenerate,—and that He who thus operates

on the human frame, is not less able than willing to accomplish and perfect his mighty work.

In all the views which have now been presented, the Gospel of Christ appears to be such a remedy for our spiritual disease as might be expected to proceed from an All-wise Physician. Even to our minds, when aided in their research by those views which divine revelation suggests, the very circumstances connected with its practical effect, which might otherwise have led us to question its Divine origin, approve themselves to be the power of God, and the wisdom of God, for the everlasting salvation of immortal souls.

CHAPTER VII.

THERE IS NO GROUND TO SUPPOSE THAT THE RELIGION OF CHRIST COULD HAVE BEEN MORE EFFECTUALLY ESTABLISHED BY ANY OTHER EVIDENCE THAN WHAT HAS BEEN AFFORDED; NOR COULD MORE OVERPOWERING EVIDENCE HAVE BEEN GIVEN, CONSISTENTLY WITH THE CONDITION OF MEN IN THIS WORLD, AS A STATE OF TRIAL AND DISCIPLINE.

THIS part of my argument may be regarded as partly gratuitous. If avowed unbelievers can shew no cause for denying the *sufficiency* of the evidence by which the Divine mission of Christ is supported,—so far as concerns them, there might be an end of the question before us; for to demand, in any case, more evidence than what appears to be sufficient, is obviously unreasonable. But it is not less certain that the demand is made—secretly if not avowedly—even by men who would not be understood as altogether rejecting the doctrine of the Gospel. As a justification of themselves for remaining in a state of doubt re-

specting its divine origin, they, in their own minds, argue that, were it really the doctrine of God, its truth might have been made more manifest, and that a gracious Being would not have withheld the strongest and most perfect evidence. The hesitation, with which this argument may, at first, be employed, affords no security against their recurring to it, just as often as their consciences would convict them of any thing that is eminently inconsistent with the profession and obligations of a Christian. There is even cause to fear that, after a long life of such hesitation, many have left the world in the same state of mind.

Yet it may, in the first instance, be fairly questioned, whether stronger evidence could have been given. At the least, I think it very improbable that any man could have previously imagined to himself a combination of evidence, either so unexceptionable in its different parts, or so perfect and conclusive in an aggregate view, as that to which our attention has been directed.

We have found that the *external* evidence comprehends miracles, not only of power, but also of knowledge; and it is not easy to imagine any other way in which direct and external evidence could have been afforded. I doubt, at the same time, whether miracles of knowledge may not be, to the reflecting mind, the more convincing of the

two. But I admit that a miracle of power may, at the moment of its being wrought, have the greater effect ; and I am inclined to think, that when the unbelieving or the hesitating mind calls for more evidence, it secretly points at some overwhelming manifestation of Divine power.

In what way, then, was this demand to be complied with ? Was there any way in which divine agency could be more unequivocally manifested, than by recalling to life, and all the functions of life, men who had passed under the power of death ? Or was there any way in which the reality of such a miracle could be made more certain and obvious than it was in the case of Lazarus, and in that of Christ himself ?

I am aware that the Resurrection of Christ is the very case in which the plea for stronger evidence has been most plausibly urged ; and I am not unwilling to examine what has been advanced upon this point, as a specimen of what the unbelieving mind may suggest. Nor do I feel that it could have been previously adverted to, with so good effect, as under this division of the general argument ; for the greater part of my reply will be found applicable,—not to the case of the resurrection alone, but to the demand for evidence in any

department, stronger than that which has been afforded.

It has been argued, that upon the supposition of Jesus having risen from the state of the dead, it was most naturally to be expected that he would appear to all the people, and particularly to the Jewish rulers, whom it was peculiarly important to convince, because their testimony in his favour, regarded as the testimony of enemies, would have been the most convincing to the world.

On the other hand, it is distinctly admitted, that Christ, after he had risen, did *not* appear “to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead ;”^{*}—and, in consequence of this admission, the objection in question presents itself the more readily to those who are conversant with the Christian Scriptures. But such a voluntary and candid statement of the fact certainly calls for a proportionally candid attention to the solution of any difficulty which the case may involve ; and I trust that such attention will not be given in vain.

It is presumed, in the first place, by the objec-

^{*} Acts, chap. x. ver. 41.

tors, that the appearance of Christ “to all the people” would have *strengthened* the evidence of the resurrection. But this argument obviously proceeds on a supposition that the evidence and certainty of an event must be proportioned to the *number* of those who bear testimony to it.

The first question, therefore, is, Whether this supposition of the objectors be fully warranted? May I not rather be justified in abiding by what I formerly said,—that the testimony of a limited number of witnesses (perhaps, as in the case of the resurrection, not less than five hundred) affords as perfect evidence as could be afforded by any multitude whatever?

If there be a doubt respecting the answer to this question, another as naturally presents itself;—Would the appearance of Christ to all the people, after he had actually risen, have brought out, in support of the fact, any unanimous and decisive testimony from the multitude, to whom he might have so appeared? Of such a multitude there must have been some who had never seen him before his death, and could, therefore, bear no testimony. Even of those who had seen him, there must have been many who had but a very imperfect recollection of his appearance. Is it not highly probable that, in the minds of individuals of this latter class, there might have been doubt and

hesitation, if not directly opposite opinions, respecting the great question—Whether the person said to be risen from the dead was the same whom they had formerly beheld? And if so—Would not their contradictory testimony have weakened, instead of strengthening, the evidence which was actually afforded?

It may be said, indeed, as I have already hinted, that the testimony of the Jewish rulers, considered as enemies of Christ, would have been more satisfying than that of his friends;—and I have no indisposition to admit that all the five hundred, who are said to have seen him at once, may have been his *friends*, or believers in him before his death. But is it certain that his appearance to the Jewish rulers would have prevailed on *them* to bear testimony to his resurrection? Or is there not cause to apprehend that their prejudices against him and his doctrine, and a regard to their worldly interest, as likely to be affected by the establishment of his religion, would have hardened their minds against an acknowledgment of the truth?

I am far from supposing that all the rulers of the Jews were alike unprincipled and dishonest. Some of them, we know, received Christ as a Saviour, upon the evidence which was afforded. But is there ground to suppose that they, who resisted

such evidence, would have acknowledged him, in consequence of his appearing to them from the state of the dead ? It must be remembered that, in the case of the resurrection of Lazarus, these men had rejected the same evidence, or very nearly the same, which the objectors presume would have afterwards proved effectual ; for Lazarus, after his resurrection, seems to have returned to all his ordinary intercourse with the world, and was, in consequence, visible to all who had any desire of seeing him. It is obvious, in these circumstances, that so far as the resurrection of Lazarus had been without effect, it was not because the evidence of it had been imperfect, but because there was nothing in the case calculated to abate that hostility to Christ, which, in the minds of the Jewish rulers, arose from a hatred of his doctrine, and a well-founded opinion that it was opposed to their worldly interest. The natural conclusion, therefore, is, that the resurrection of Christ himself, in whatever way it had been evidenced, would have produced as little effect, without their minds being prepared to make some sacrifice both of their prejudices and their worldly interest to the cause of truth. Such a preparation of mind was manifested on the part of those who actually received Christ as a Saviour. They did not receive him without sufficient evidence ;

but, while evidence was afforded, they had also the indispensable advantage of being willing to admit and acknowledge the truth, at the expense of all the sacrifice which was required. On the other hand, they who rejected the Saviour assigned a reason for their conduct which would have been just as valid, though, to each of them individually, he had appeared from the state of the dead,—and a reason which, under the influence of corrupt hearts, may have had the effect of partly deceiving themselves, so as to lull their consciences asleep. They do not appear to have denied the reality of Christ's miracles ; but they ascribed them to the agency of the devil, with whom they maintained that he was in league for defeating the cause of God in the world ; and it is manifest that the same argument would have remained to them, in all its supposed strength, though they had actually seen and handled a risen Saviour.

Dismissing, however, from our view, all that is peculiar to the case of the resurrection of Christ, —and supposing it a possible thing that such evidence of his Divine mission, as would have brought all the Jewish rulers to believe in him, might have been, in one way or other, afforded to them in particular,—Let us consider what would have been the consequence.

It is not impossible that, through their influence, the great body of the Jewish nation might have *outwardly* acknowledged Christ as a messenger from Heaven; and I shall not inquire too strictly whether he would, in this way, have gained a greater number of *true* disciples, than he obtained without any such aid. But, had he been at once and cordially acknowledged throughout all the land of Judea, what effect would it have had on the evidence of his Divine mission, as presented to other nations, and other generations of men? This is the great question;—for in regard to the Jews in particular, whether rulers or people, it will scarcely be maintained that they had, on their own account, a right to be favoured with greater evidence than what was to be allowed to the world at large. There could be no good reason for granting such a distinguishing favour to them, unless their reception of the Christian doctrine was to have the effect of strengthening the evidences of Christianity to others. Yet we shall find, on the contrary, that more overpowering evidence of Christ's Divine mission,—in whatever way it might have been at first afforded,—that any such overpowering evidence as could have prevailed on the great body of the Jewish nation at once to receive and acknowledge him,—would have been extremely unfavourable to both

the more extended propagation, and the ultimate maintenance, of his religion.

Hated, as the Jewish nation had been, by all around them, and chiefly on account of a religious distinction,—their unanimous acceptance of Christ, so far from recommending his cause to others, would have excited a strong and universal suspicion of a concerted design among the Jews to deceive the nations, with a view to promote their own national aggrandizement. The opposition which the rulers had, for a time, given to him and his doctrine, would have been regarded as nothing else than a cunning device to cover their ultimate design, and thereby to procure greater credit to the testimony which they were at length to give in his favour. Not only would his doctrine and its evidences have been represented as delusive, it would have been more difficult, in this case, to prove the contrary; for nothing serves more strongly to establish the truth of his Divine mission, than the zeal with which his enemies persevered in their attempts to detect imposture, even in the procedure of his Apostles after his own ascension to Heaven, and the complete failure of these attempts in circumstances which afforded every opportunity for detection.

Even upon the unlikely supposition, that una-

nimity among the Jews in their acceptance of Christ had produced a corresponding unanimity, at the time, among other nations, succeeding generations of men, and *we*, more particularly, in these latter times, would have been only left the more at a loss how to form any decided opinion concerning the pretensions and the doctrine of one, whose cause the powers of the world had, at the beginning, so combined to support, as to prevent either his character or his mission from undergoing that severe scrutiny by which truth is most effectually ascertained. Those men who have no good will to a doctrine so pure and holy as that of Christ, would have had too plausible a pretence for alleging—what they have alleged without any such ground—that the Christian faith had been, in its origin, nothing else than a fraudulent invention of designing statesmen, who had combined to impose it on the nations of the earth, for the purpose of keeping the multitude in awe.

It is only that opposition which Christianity so long experienced from the powers of the world, that now effectually defends it against such a charge; and it is chiefly to the backwardness of men—of the Jews in particular—at first to acknowledge its truth,—it is to that scrupulous examination which its evidences, in consequence, underwent, that we are indebted for the comfortable

assurance that they who, at the beginning, received it, were not likely either to be themselves deceived, or to transmit an imposture to others.

In these circumstances, it is manifest that more overpowering evidence of Christ's Divine mission must have been unfavourable to the permanent maintenance of his religion, so far as it was to depend on either the means or the way and manner of its original establishment,—in short, that such overpowering evidence must have proved ultimately injurious to the cause of Christ, unless renewed communications of similar evidence had been repeatedly and frequently made to every generation of men, and to every people or nation under heaven, who had once received the faith of the Gospel.

Whether it was possible that overpowering evidence should have been so continued, by miraculous agency, may at least admit of a question; for if miracles had been so common as the case would have required, they would the less have distinguished themselves, to the eye of the outward observer, from what must have happened in the ordinary course of nature; and certain it is, that any such application and use of overpowering evidence—whether compatible or not with the nature of things—would have been incompatible with the

moral government of God, and the condition of men in this world as a state of probation.

Were that evidence of invisible things which is presented to the human mind, as complete and perfect as the evidence, which our eyes or our ears afford, for the existence and the nature of the material objects around us, we could no more avoid believing, than we can avoid seeing or hearing ;—our believing would be no proof of our fairness and candour in accepting and sustaining evidence, nor any proof of our not hating the truth which is revealed to us. Our faith, becoming a matter of necessity or compulsion, would not be entitled to those praises which are bestowed upon it ; for it would not be, in itself, a principle of any moral excellence. But, under the influence of such evidence, as we actually have, for the truth of divine things,—evidence calculated to convince and satisfy, but not to overpower and compel the mind,—our belief or unbelief is a fair criterion of our integrity. In consequence of there being room left for objections of some sort, it is in the power of men, who hate the light on account of their deeds being evil, to sustain captious and groundless objections, so as to manifest their perversion of mind, and their attachment to their evil deeds ; and not less is it in the power of others to shew their can-

dour and honesty, by disregarding those objections which they find to be frivolous or unreasonable, and to evince their love of the truth, by believing in it, and abiding by it, in defiance of arguments by which others are seduced. The unbelief of the one class becomes, in this view, a just ground of condemnation ; and the faith of the other is, through the grace of God, recognised as a proper subject of what the Scriptures denominate a *reward*—that reward which Christ hath purchased for those who believe in and obey him.

Such a method of dealing with his intelligent offspring, appears to be worthy of God. In regard to the evidence of Divine things, it seems to be the only method of dealing with men, that is compatible with the great design of providence respecting them in the present world.

CHAPTER VIII.

SUMMARY OF THE WHOLE PRECEDING ARGUMENT, WITH
A BRIEF VIEW OF THE EFFECT WHICH MAY BE REASONABLY EXPECTED FROM CONTINUED AND PATIENT
ENDEAVOURS TO URGE IT ON THE MINDS OF MEN.

THE number and variety of topics, to which the reader's attention has been called, make it the more important to reconsider them in an abbreviated or condensed view, in order that their combined force may be duly perceived.

Without a Divine Revelation, men were incapable of attaining satisfaction and establishment of mind, respecting their own existing condition, and their ultimate destination. Yet a just understanding of things, which so nearly concerned them, was essential to their duly improving by the present dispensations of Providence; and there was therefore ground to hope that the Being, who at first created them—a Being of infinite goodness—would not withhold the requisite communication of his own counsel and purposes respecting them.

The Gospel of Christ professes to be that revelation from heaven, of which men were in want, and for which they had ground to hope. Does its import justify this pretension?

It presents to us consistent and satisfying views of those fundamental truths of religion, which the reason of man had but imperfectly recognised. The evidence which human reason had attained, for the reality of these things, was unsatisfactory, because the infinite perfection of the Divine Being—the point on which the whole depended—did not seem to be fully justified by the present disposals of Providence, under which there is so nearly one outward event to the righteous and the wicked. A certainty of a future state was indispensable for the removal of this difficulty. The researches of human reason fell short of this object. But the Gospel of Christ has supplied the defect, in the way of all others most satisfactory,—not only by direct assurances,—but by throwing additional light on the principles and grounds of every argument for a future state, which unassisted reason had itself devised.

The Gospel of Christ also directs us to many interesting views of our condition, and of the counsels of Heaven respecting it, which the reason of man had not anticipated.

It directs us to recognise the transgression and fall of the parents of our race, as having entailed on us both sin and misery.—It is said that this doctrine is unreasonable. But, if it be not admitted that the human race were at first created holy and happy, and that they made themselves sinful and miserable,—the only other conclusion seems to be, that the world of mankind must have been created by God in its present state,—full as it is of both natural and moral evil,—a conclusion which it is presumed will not recommend itself to any who believe in a Being of infinite goodness.

The Gospel also teaches us that God, of his infinite mercy, has provided for our salvation from the punishment and the power of sin, and for our consequent restoration to both perfection and happiness.

To the scheme of salvation thus revealed, human reason has objected that there are many things in it mysterious and incomprehensible. But there is nothing connected with it more mysterious than what we otherwise recognise concerning the character and works of an Infinite Being.—It has been said that the doctrine of vicarious suffering, on the part of the Saviour, cannot be reconciled with the wisdom and goodness of God. But we have seen, on the one hand,

that, without such an atonement for sin, men had not ground to hope for pardoning mercy, and, on the other hand, that the suffering of the Son of God, in the nature of man, secures the honour of the Divine government in the extension of mercy to every penitent sinner.—The agency of the spirit of God, in renewing the spirit of man, has been objected to as an impossible thing, because unperceived by men. But would it not be presumptuous to maintain that the Being who created the human soul—to whom all things which do not involve a contradiction are alike possible and easy—may not find access to the spirits which he hath made, even without a consciousness of it on their part?

In the department of moral duty, human reason has objected against much that is peculiar to the Gospel of Christ, as mortifying and degrading. But we have seen that the precepts in question, —when their object and import are duly ascertained and considered,—cannot be regarded as either unnatural or degrading, but that a conformity to them is, on the contrary, conducive to both our perfection and happiness.

The Gospel of Christ, considered in these views, affords presumptive evidence of its own Divine origin. It cannot be regarded as “the wisdom

of this world," but—when considered in connexion with the condition and circumstances of its Author—may well be regarded as "the wisdom of God."

The Divine mission of Christ is also supported by much direct and positive evidence. But, in order to our judging of the reality of Christ's miracles, we have first inquired into the truth of the Gospel history, as comprising facts not miraculous, on the ground of which the truth of the miracles might be afterwards established.

We have found that the Gospel history affords much *internal* evidence of its own truth.

It possesses, in a remarkable degree, that consistency which is essential to our confidence in any narrative. For, while there are such appearances of discrepance, in the accounts presented by its different authors, as seem to forbid our supposing that they had any mutual consultation, the most acute and determined adversaries of the Christian cause have not been able, in any one instance, to establish a charge of real inconsistency.

There is also internal evidence that its authors could not be actuated by any sinister design. For we have seen that they had no worldly interest which they could hope to promote by what they

have written, and that the great purpose to be served by their narrative was in direct opposition to their own prejudices. We do not even find them vindicating their Master's honour in those cases respecting which it was most likely to be called in question. They seem to have felt that their single duty consisted in recording those things of which they had been witnesses, leaving the event to God.

Their narratives also afforded every possible facility for the detection of any falsehood which they might have contained,—by such a minute statement of the circumstances of time and place, together with the names and designations of witnesses, as was calculated to lay open the whole case for the examination and judgment of the world.

In addition to such presumptive evidence for the truth of the Gospel history, we have more absolute and conclusive proof.

We have seen that, in the writings of early Christians, (some of them men who lived in the Apostolic age,) there are not only unequivocal allusions to the Gospel history, but direct mention made of the different treatises which it comprises, together with the names of their respective authors. It, therefore, seems undeniable that the Gospel history was published at a time when the

Jewish rulers had it in their power not only to contradict any falsehood which it might have contained, but also to produce, in support of their contradiction, eye-witnesses of those facts which might have been misrepresented. Yet equally certain is it, that no attempt was made,—while it could thus have been done with effect,—to invalidate the truth of the Gospel record, or to disprove, more particularly, those facts and circumstances not miraculous, on the authority of which the evidence of Christ's miracles was to depend.

In what way are we to account for these things? Is it possible to suppose that the Jewish rulers, —deeply interested as they were, or imagined themselves to be, in resisting the progress of the Gospel,—would not have published, if they had found it in their power, a confutation of the Gospel history, which would have been as widely circulated as the writings of the Evangelists? Or, is it not manifest, from their making no such attempt, that a confutation was impracticable?

We have farther seen, that the truth of the Gospel record was subsequently and incidentally corroborated, in many important points, by authors adverse to the religion of Christ.

A variety of respectable heathen authors,—either in their historical detail of what concerned

the Roman Empire, or with more immediate reference to its existing condition,—have adverted to many of the most important points of the Gospel history, as facts which were not to be questioned. The exact conformity, therefore, of their testimony to that of the Evangelists—so far as the same points are concerned—gives the latter an additional claim to our confidence, even for the truth of other circumstances which fill up their narrative.

From the same sources of information we learn that, within about thirty years after the death of Christ, the publication of the Gospel history, and the corresponding labour of the Apostles, had well nigh subverted the religion—not of Judea alone, but of the Roman Empire. Yet, if the Roman government could have detected and exposed any falsehood in that record on which Christian faith was established, the prevalence of Christianity would have been short-lived. In these circumstances the incontrovertible fact—that, upon this subject, the imperial government was just as silent as the Jewish rulers had been, affords such evidence of the truth of the Gospel history, as cannot be adduced in support of any other historical record on earth.

We have also the strongest ground to believe

that the Gospel history, as originally published, has been faithfully transmitted to men of the present day.—The preservation of early manuscripts of the New Testament, and the translations of it into various languages,—the quotations from it by innumerable authors from the beginning to the present times, and the controversial discussion of which both its import and its language have never ceased to be the subject—afford not only more perfect evidence of faithful transmission than has been exemplified in any other case, but such evidence, in respect of both strength and variety, as no mind could have anticipated.

With the aid, then, of the Gospel history, as a record of facts not miraculous—Have we, or have we not, decisive proof of the reality of Christ's miracles, and consequently of his Divine mission?

“No man,” said Nicodemus to Christ himself, “can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.” Nicodemus perceived that such a suspension of the laws of nature, as was manifested in the works to which he referred, could not be otherwise effected than by Divine and preternatural agency.

Evil spirits, indeed, are said to have wrought miracles. But evil spirits can have no power that

is not derived from God, and under his control. Nor is it consistent with any just idea of either the truth or the goodness of the Divine Being, to suppose that he permits evil spirits to exercise their power in a way which can ultimately deceive the well-disposed and upright in heart. If the magicians of Egypt performed miracles by the invocation and aid of evil spirits, their miracles were overruled by God in a way which tended to defeat their own object.

It has been maintained, indeed, by a celebrated philosopher (Mr Hume,) that the reality of miracles is a thing so incredible, that it cannot be proved by human testimony. But that author's argument has its foundation in Atheism ; and I am reasoning, on the contrary, with men who believe in God.

Were there no God, the Creator of all things, on whom all things depend, we might be led to conclude, that the laws of nature are eternal ; and there might also arise a presumption that they are unchangeable, since we could not recognise any power by which an alteration or change could be effected. But, if we admit that there is a Being who created all things, and who, in disposing of the works of his hand, must have established the laws of nature, it is impossible to deny that their

operation may be suspended by the same power which established them. Even the likelihood or improbability of such an event must depend on the importance of the end proposed.

The reality of miracles may therefore be proved by human testimony, if the testimony be such as would be, in any other case, entitled to perfect credit, or, in other words, if there be no ground to apprehend deception.

Now, in the case of the miracles of Christ, Was it not some security against deception that they were wrought in an enlightened age, and among a people who, from their having been raised superior to the delusions of Polytheism, must have been better qualified than others to form a judgment respecting the pretensions of any thing—whether word or deed—which was represented as proceeding from the true and living God? Was there not additional security against deception, arising from the circumstance—That the Author of the miracles in question had no outward means of rewarding any man for combining with him to deceive the world,—that his miracles were not wrought for upholding existing institutions which any ruling powers were, at the same time, concerned to maintain,—but, on the contrary, for the accomplishment of a purpose to which both the

people and the government of his country were disinclined? Was there not greater security afforded by the *number* of Christ's miracles—the variety of cases, to human eye unforeseen, in which his miraculous power was exerted? Was not the security against deception farther strengthened by the unequivocal nature of some of the cases in which he undertook to exemplify his miraculous agency—cases in which he manifested his power over the very elements, of which the visible frame of nature is composed, and over death itself, the king of terrors?

Were the Apostles of Christ, in particular, considered as witnesses of his miracles, not qualified to ascertain what they have reported to the world? Their report consists chiefly of facts and circumstances which were presented to their bodily senses. We have it in our own power to judge whether, upon the ground of these facts, we ought to concur with the witnesses in regarding the transactions as miraculous. But, in the first instance, were they qualified for what they appear to have undertaken?

Two of them, who have written the Gospel history, cannot have been ignorant men. More of the number seem to have been of such a rank or condition in society, as admitted of their minds

being somewhat invigorated by intercourse with the world. It is, at the same time, evident from the Gospel narrative, that every advantage was afforded them for ascertaining the facts to which they have borne witness. This was remarkably the case, in reference to the resurrection of their Master ;—and, as to other miracles which we have examined, the publicity of the whole procedure afforded an immense advantage. Even supposing the Apostles to have imagined that they saw what was not visible, or heard what was not spoken, would not their mistake have been corrected by those other witnesses, whose bodily senses were not subject to the same illusion ?

If it be manifest that the Apostles could not be deceived, Can we, with equal safety, acquit them of any intention to deceive others ?

Supposing that they were in their hearts regardless of truth, it was impossible that, with the means which they possessed, they could entertain any hope of imposing on the world what they knew to be a falsehood. Nor was it more possible that they could expect any advantage to themselves from preaching the doctrine of their Master, if they had not believed it to be the doctrine of God. They must have been aware, from the beginning, that by doing so, they were to expose

themselves to much persecution. Observation and experience must soon have confirmed their apprehension—even of a violent death. Yet they persevered to the end in the work which their Master had assigned to them—willing to suffer death rather than abandon his cause.

In such circumstances, the fair conclusion seems to be, that either the testimony of the Apostles ought to be sustained, or there ought to be an end to belief founded upon testimony.

But the Apostles not only bore witness, as we have seen, to the miracles of Christ—they did, themselves, work miracles, as a proof of their being commissioned to speak in his name. Paul, in particular, though not originally of the college of Apostles, makes direct and explicit reference to such miracles, in his Epistles to the Corinthians and the Galatians. He appeals to the men whom he addressed, for the miracles which he had wrought among them. It is scarcely possible to suppose that, upon this point, he could deceive them, or that he made such an appeal, without a consciousness of truth.

The divine origin of the Christian doctrine is

also established by evidence arising from the fulfilment of prophecy.

Prophecy, considered in connexion with its fulfilment, is just as much a miracle of knowledge, as any mighty work can be a miracle of power; and it has even some advantages over miracles of power.

We can examine and contemplate, both long and deliberately, all the circumstances with which a prophecy is connected. There is no room for the pretence—so commonly urged in the case of other miracles—that even an eye-witness may be deceived by momentary appearances. Nor does it seem that, in regard to any particular prophecy, a later age can be much in want of those advantages for the requisite examination, which were enjoyed by the men in whose time it was fulfilled.

When a variety of prophecies have one common object, as in the case before us, the evidence arising from their fulfilment is also progressive in its influence. The prophetic intimations, in regular succession, reflect such light on one another, as to strengthen the evidence resulting from each.

There has been much complaint about the *obscurity* of prophecy. But, if it were as explicit as seems to be demanded, there would be too much ground for alleging that the prophetic language

had put it in the power of a man to bring about its fulfilment, in a way calculated to serve a deceitful purpose.

In referring to the Old Testament, as a record of prophecies, it is not necessary to produce evidence of its Divine inspiration;—nothing more can be requisite than an assurance of its early existence, as a record in which the prophecies are contained—a fact which seems to be placed beyond question.

Now, among other prophecies of the Old Testament, it contains a rich variety of intimations, in regular succession, that some extraordinary and powerful means would at length be employed, for the deliverance of mankind from the consequences of their transgression and fall, and for the prevalence of true religion among all nations. At the time when these intimations were given and recorded, there was nothing in the visible course of events to justify any corresponding expectation. Yet the Gospel of Christ, and the means employed for its propagation, are a satisfying fulfilment of what was foretold.

There are also prophecies in the Old Testament which directed the attention of men, more particularly, to the character and work of the promised Deliverer, and even to the time which had been

fixed and determined for his appearance. These intimations were as explicit as is at all consistent with the degree of obscurity requisite in the language of prophecy. Of those to which I have referred, the latest were given, five hundred years before the birth of Christ. Yet they received in him such exact fulfilment, as forbids us to doubt that he was the person, from the beginning promised and designed as the great Deliverer of the human race.

There are, likewise, prophecies, in both the Old and the New Testaments, relative to the subsequent fortunes both of the Christian church and of the Jewish nation. Those which relate to the propagation and establishment of the religion of Christ, received, very speedily, such a fulfilment as no human wisdom could have anticipated. Those which relate to the destruction of Jerusalem were both amply and exactly fulfilled. Even the more extraordinary intimation—that the Jews, though effectually dispersed among the other nations of the earth, should still be preserved and recognised as a separate people, in order to their being at length restored as a nation, has been hitherto fulfilled in a way which has so much of a miraculous aspect, as to afford a strong pledge of its ultimate and perfect fulfilment, by the conversion of that people to the Christian faith,

and their consequent re-establishment in the land of their fathers.

The way in which the Gospel was propagated affords farther evidence of its truth.

It is well known that, within less than fifty years after the death of Christ, his religion was embraced by multitudes in almost every nation of the civilized world. It gradually recommended itself to the learned as well as the unlearned of every class and condition. The men employed in its propagation were, with the exception of one, comparatively illiterate; but they appealed, for the truth of what they taught, to the evidence of miracles, as wrought by them in the most public manner, and under the eye of those to whom they preached. The doctrine which they inculcated did not hold out to men a promise of any worldly advantage. It made no concession to any thing which was called religion among the heathen. It proclaimed, on the contrary, a spiritual warfare against every species of superstition which prevailed in the habitable world. It thereby provoked the powers of the world to adopt measures of the most determined hostility against it. The early Christians were, in consequence, subjected to unexampled persecution. Yet the patience and fortitude, with which they endured the most ex-

quisite and protracted suffering, had only the effect of gaining new converts to the Christian faith. Their fortitude was such as was calculated to produce this effect ; for it was such as we cannot reasonably ascribe to the human mind, otherwise than as strengthened and upheld by Divine influence.

The man who, duly considering these things, can yet refuse to admit that the religion of Christ was an object of Divine protection, or deny that its Author was sent of God, would not, I apprehend, have believed on any other evidence.

It is not, however, to be forgotten, that the great purpose for which the wisdom and grace of God were revealed in the Gospel, was “ to teach men to live soberly, righteously, and Godly,” and that, according to Christ himself, the tree is to be known by its fruit.

Does the effect, then, which Christianity in this respect produces, justify its claim to be regarded as the power of God and the wisdom of God ?

All that the Gospel promised, from the beginning, was a partial and progressive reformation in the present world, to be perfected in a future state. —Does it not fulfil this promise ?

Strictly speaking, the Gospel of Christ is not

answerable for the conduct of those who may *falsely* call themselves by his name ; and it might, therefore, be regarded as enough for our present purpose, that the Christian world has never been without men who have been enabled, through Divine grace, to adorn the doctrine of their God and Saviour, by those sublime and exalted virtues which he inculcated. But it is not less certain that their example has had an influence on the mind and temper of others, and that even the outward profession of a religion of such purity and excellence, has more or less deterred men from an open violation of its precepts.

It is impossible, indeed, to question the efficacy of the Gospel, in respect of some of its distinguishing precepts ; for the law of Christ, in regard to them, has been embraced and sanctioned by human institutions, which confessedly regulate the conduct of Christian nations.

If it still be objected, that, in the great work of reforming the world, the progress of the Gospel is slow, my answer is—that all the purposes of Heaven respecting us appear to be accomplished in a slow and gradual manner, in order to our being, ourselves, the more instrumental towards their accomplishment,—and that a slow and progressive restoration of our nature to its original purity may be a mean, in the hand of God, of

preparing it more duly for a future state of permanent and unchangeable bliss.

In what way, then, could more perfect evidence have been afforded, for establishing men in the faith of the Gospel? I am at a loss to imagine any species or kind of evidence from which the Divine Mission of Christ does not derive support. But, supposing that miracles, in particular, might have been wrought in some way more overpowering to the human mind, or more irresistible at the moment,—and supposing that, in consequence of an overpowering dispensation of miracles, all nations had been, at once, prevailed on to receive Christ as a Saviour,—what would have been the ultimate effect? Succeeding generations of men, and *we*, more particularly, in these latter times, might have been at a loss how to form any decided opinion concerning the pretensions and the doctrine of One, whose cause the powers of the world had, at the beginning, so combined to support, as to prevent either his character or his mission from undergoing that severe scrutiny, which is so essential for either detecting imposture or ascertaining truth.

Even supposing it to have been compatible with the nature of things that a renewal of overpowering miracles, from age to age, and from day to

day, should have continued, throughout all generations, to produce the same effect,—would such an application of overpowering evidence have been consistent with the great principles of the Divine Government? Most certainly, it would not have been consistent with the design of Providence respecting this world, as a state of probation. For, under the compulsory influence of overpowering miracles, our believing would be no proof of fairness and candour in judging of what is proposed to us, nor any proof of our not hating the truth which is revealed.

WHAT effect may be reasonably expected from the argument which I have thus recapitulated?—Is it possible that any man who has deliberately and candidly considered it, in all its bearings, should not acknowledge that the Divine Mission of Christ is supported by convincing evidence? Perhaps some parts of the argument may have appeared to the reader less conclusive than others; perhaps, some things may have been feebly stated; or, it may be, that I have been so injudicious as to rest more on some points of the evidence than their separate importance could justify. But the question is not what conclusion the reader

should derive from any one article of evidence or argument which he conceives to be defective. He is called upon, in all fairness, to consider and appreciate the whole,—both to allow, to every separate part, the weight to which it is justly entitled, and to consider the whole in that aggregate and connected view in which it is presented to him.

To my mind, the evidence which has been detailed, especially when considered in its just connexion, appears so irresistible, as to preclude the possibility of supposing that it can be rejected on *speculative* ground. I am inclined to think, that upon the supposition of the two cases being considered in a speculative view, apart from any practical bias, it would be less unnatural to apprehend that a man might refuse to believe in an infinite and invisible Being, or in any thing which does not manifest itself to his bodily senses, than that, truly believing in God, he should refuse to believe in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of men. But if there exist, in this case, any speculative enigma, arising from the deistical professions of some men, it is abundantly solved, in a practical view, by the Author of Christianity himself; for he intimated, from the beginning, that many would “love darkness rather than light,”—ignorance rather than the knowledge which he com-

municated,—on account of their deeds being evil, and of their hearts being devoted to what is evil.

How, then, and in what degree, does this last consideration tend to modify the importance of those evidences of Christianity which are addressed to the human understanding?

I am not only convinced that the heart of man must be in some measure right with God, before his understanding effectually recognise the truth of the Gospel,—I regard it as beyond question, that, when through Divine grace men are brought to a just sense of their condition as ignorant and sinful creatures, even they, who are very imperfectly qualified to judge of the external evidences of Christianity, may be effectually induced to believe in and embrace it, in consequence of their perceiving it to be in all respects accommodated to their spiritual wants. It could not otherwise be said that the poor have “the Gospel preached to them,” or that the Gospel is designed for the poor and uneducated.

If a distinct understanding of all the grounds of Christian evidence were indispensable to the exercise of faith in Christ, the great body of those who constitute his Church upon earth, must have been incapable of receiving and embracing him as

a Saviour,—incapable from a want of that intellectual energy which education imparts. But the Author of Christianity assures us, that “if a man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.”—The whole scheme of the Gospel is so well adapted to what we know and feel to be our existing condition, that the man, whose heart no longer objects to it as a doctrine of righteousness, naturally cleaves to it as the anchor of his soul ; and, so far as an exercise of the understanding is still essential to Christian faith, why should we doubt that the Divine Being is ready to impart the aid of his spirit, for the supply of our wants, even in this department ?

For these reasons, I trust that the view which I have presented of the Christian doctrine, as in all respects worthy of God and accommodated to the condition of men, may not be without a salutary effect. But does this view of the case supersede the importance of such an appeal as I have also made to the human understanding, on the subject of the *external* evidences of the Gospel ?

There are symptoms of a disposition, in some friends of the Christian cause, to attach less importance, than has been hitherto allowed, to the external evidences. But it seems to me, that, in

this respect, they are not justified by either Scripture or reason.

The miracles of Christ appear to have been originally productive of great effect. No man can read the Gospel history without perceiving that miracles were the great instrument employed for prevailing on men to believe in him. After his ascension, the Apostles did not preach his doctrine without appealing in the strongest manner, both to the miracles which he had wrought, and to the fulfilment of prophecy, as evidence that he had been sent of God ; nor can there be a doubt that they were, in this respect, under Divine guidance.

For what reason shall we not imitate their example ?

It results from the nature of the case, that the miracles of Christ must have been intended for the benefit of men in all ages ; for, so far as it can be made evident that preternatural agency was employed, the argument derived from it ought to be just as powerful at the present day as it was to the witnesses of the transactions in question. If the impression which the argument makes be not now so strong, its failure can be ascribed to nothing else than a corresponding deficiency in the assurance which we have of the reality of the miracles.

Upon what ground, then, is it possible to suppose—either that we should be excused from continuing to urge, on the minds of men, the evidence which we have for the Christian miracles, or that we should urge it without effect? We have no right to imagine that the counsel of Heaven, respecting the means of bringing men to believe in the Gospel, has undergone such a change, as would warrant a departure from what is sanctioned by the example of its first teachers, and by the success which attended their labour.

It is true, that the Apostles had an advantage, which we do not enjoy. They were themselves invested with a power of working miracles. But how does this affect the obligation under which we are laid? The power of working miracles does not seem to have been imparted to them, for the immediate conviction *only* of the eye-witnesses of such mighty works; for we find the Apostle Paul referring to the miracles which he had wrought, in order that the same means, which had been originally effectual for convincing men of the truth, might still be conducive to the confirmation and establishment of their faith. Nay, while the Apostles wrought miracles, they did not the less refer men, throughout all the civilized world, to miracles which the great majority of them *had not seen*,—to the miracles which Christ himself had

wrought, exclusively in the land of Judea. What they did, in this respect, we have it still in our power to do ;—and on what imaginable ground shall we doubt the importance of doing it ?

Even if it were conceded that uneducated men cannot be expected to profit, in any degree, by an illustration of the external evidences of Christianity, this could be no reason for denying the advantage of it to others. But we know that, by the Apostles of Christ, the argument founded on the external evidences was urged on all classes of men ; and we have no ground to suppose that, in reference to any class, it was urged in vain. The argument, both from miracles and from the fulfilment of prophecy, is calculated to make some impression on every mind ;—It addresses itself to the common sense of mankind ; and I have no doubt that its salutary influence is felt by many, who could not unfold such an argument for the conviction of others. If uneducated men be little qualified to solve many difficult questions which may occur in the discussion of the external evidences, they have, at least, the corresponding advantage, that such questions are not very likely to occur to their own minds.

Without distinguishing, therefore, between dif-

ferent classes of men, let me put the case—that one, hitherto denying or hesitating to acknowledge the truth of the Gospel, has the external evidences of its truth fairly presented to him.—In what way shall we suppose that he avoids to believe, without incurring, in the mean time, such disapprobation of his own mind, as *may*, through Divine grace, prove an earnest of future conviction?

If he refuse to give his attention to the subject, in what way shall he justify himself? Is it possible that his mind can approve him, in regarding the question at issue as one of small importance to a rational and immortal being?

If, on the contrary, he examine the case, and give attention to the whole argument,—I shall not say that a corrupt heart may not still induce him to reject the truth as it is in Jesus. But it seems unlikely that he should be able to reject it, without a warfare between his understanding on the one side, and the corrupt principles of his nature on the other, or without some consciousness, also, of the bias of his heart against the Gospel as a doctrine according to godliness;—It seems unlikely that he should be able to reject it, without some testimony of his conscience against him, which, through the grace of God strengthening it,

may at length prevail for his deliverance from the toils of iniquity.

Supposing,—what is most probable,—that the person in question neither absolutely refuses to give attention to the Christian evidences, nor examines them with the requisite care,—How does he acquit himself to his conscience?—He has stopt short in his labour for ascertaining the truth ; and the real cause of his being unwilling to proceed farther is, that a dislike to the import and tendency of the Christian doctrine makes the inquiry respecting it disagreeable to him. But, in his own mind, his defence is—that he finds no encouragement to follow out such an investigation,—that, so far as he has gone, he is not satisfied,—and that he is not willing to persevere in fruitless labour.—Now, to what does this apology amount ? He is in doubt whether he ought, or ought not, to believe in Christ,—consequently in doubt respecting a matter, on which he cannot deny that his own eternal salvation may depend. Is it possible that, in these circumstances, and refusing to renew the investigation, he can enjoy the approbation of his own conscience ? Is it possible that he should account it wise, or should not perceive it to be the greatest of all folly, to leave such a question unsettled, without employing the means which are

still in his power for the solution of his doubts, and the consequent establishment of his mind?

Is no good to be expected from inviting such a man to renewed investigation? Supposing that the invitation is not accepted,—if it only remind him of his own folly, his consciousness of wrong may be gradually increased and strengthened, till it lead to a blessed change.

WILL any man, who has read the preceding pages of this volume, permit me, before I conclude, to suppose that he is more or less in such a state of mind as that to which I have last adverted? Have the evidences of Christianity made such an impression on him, that he cannot at once deny and reject it? Does he also perceive that, if it be true, it materially concerns his everlasting welfare? Does he, at the same time, admit that there are points of the evidence, of which he may better perceive the force upon reconsideration?—If such be the state of his mind—Is it possible that he can see it wise to discontinue his investigation of the subject, till his opinion be, in one way or other, established? Is there any other occupation that can, with reason, prevent him from devoting the requisite time to the great work of ascertaining

what he may find indispensable to be believed and accepted for the salvation of his immortal soul? —If he acknowledge that he feels any aversion to the subject, What reason can he assign for such aversion? An unwillingness to be saved in the way of such perfect righteousness as the Gospel requires—is the only ground of aversion that can be supposed to prevail, in a case of such incalculable importance.—Let him, therefore, pray to God for deliverance from the dominion of a corrupt and wicked heart ;—and, while he reviews more deliberately the external evidences of the Gospel of Christ, let him never fail to consider its admirable adaptation to the supply of all his wants as a Spiritual and Immortal Being.

THE END.

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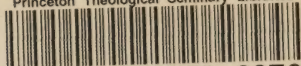
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